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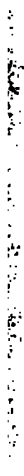
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OF  
ENGLISH LITERATURE

BY  
H. A. TAINE, D. C. L.



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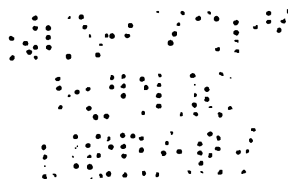
# HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

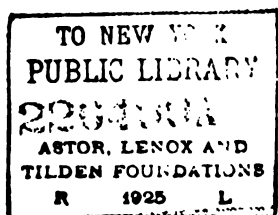
BY H. A. TAINE, D.C.L.

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One of the Masters at the Edinburgh Academy

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## BOOK II

# THE RENAISSANCE

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### CHAPTER I

#### *The Pagan Renaissance.*

#### § 1. MANNERS OF THE TIME.

##### I.

FOR seventeen centuries a deep and sad thought had weighed upon the spirit of man, first to overwhelm it, then to exalt and to weaken it, never loosing its hold throughout this long space of time. It was the idea of the weakness and decay of the human race. Greek corruption, Roman oppression, and the dissolution of the ancient world, had given rise to it; it, in its turn, had produced a stoical resignation, an epicurean indifference, Alexandrian mysticism, and the Christian hope in the kingdom of God. "The world is evil and lost, let us escape by insensibility, amazement, ecstasy." Thus spoke the philosophers; and religion, coming after, announced that the end was near: "Prepare, for the kingdom of God is at hand." For a thousand years universal ruin incessantly drove still deeper into their hearts this gloomy thought; and when man in the



feudal state raised himself, by sheer force of courage and muscles, from the depths of final imbecility and general misery, he discovered his thought and his work fettered by the crushing idea, which, forbidding a life of nature and worldly hopes, erected into ideals the obedience of the monk and the dreams of fanatics.

It grew ever worse and worse. For the natural result of such a conception, as of the miseries which engender it, and the discouragement which it gives rise to, is to do away with personal action, and to replace originality by submission. From the fourth century, gradually the dead letter was substituted for the living faith. Christians resigned themselves into the hands of the clergy, they into the hands of the Pope. Christian opinions were subordinated to theologians, and theologians to the Fathers. Christian faith was reduced to the accomplishment of works, and works to the accomplishment of ceremonies. Religion, fluid during the first centuries, was now congealed into a hard crystal, and the coarse contact of the barbarians had deposited upon its surface a layer of idolatry : theocracy and the Inquisition, the monopoly of the clergy and the prohibition of the Scriptures, the worship of relics and the sale of indulgences began to appear. In place of Christianity, the church ; in place of a free creed, enforced orthodoxy ; in place of moral fervour, fixed religious practices ; in place of the heart and stirring thought, outward and mechanical discipline : such are the characteristics of the middle ages. Under this constraint thinking society had ceased to think ; philosophy was turned into a text-book, and poetry into dotage ; and mankind, slothful and crouching, delivering up their conscience and their conduct into the hands of their priests, seemed but as puppets,

fit only for reciting a catechism and mumbling over beads.<sup>1</sup>

At last invention makes another start ; and it makes it by the efforts of the lay society, which rejected theocracy, kept the State free, and which presently discovered, or re-discovered, one after another, the industries, sciences, and arts. All was renewed ; America and the Indies were added to the map of the world ; the shape of the earth was ascertained, the system of the universe propounded, modern philology was inaugurated, the experimental sciences set on foot, art and literature shot forth like a harvest, religion was transformed : there was no province of human intelligence and action which was not refreshed and fertilised by this universal effort. It was so great, that it passed from the innovators to the laggards, and reformed Catholicism in the face of Protestantism which it formed. It seems as though men had suddenly opened their eyes and seen. In fact, they attain a new and superior kind of intelligence. It is the proper feature of this age, that men no longer make themselves masters of objects by bits, or isolated, or through scholastic or mechanical classifications, but as a whole, in general and complete views, with the eager grasp of a sympathetic spirit, which being placed before a vast object, penetrates it in all its parts, tries it in all its relations, appropriates and assimilates it, impresses upon itself its living and potent image, so life-like and so powerful, that it is fain to translate it into externals through a work of art or an action. An extraordinary warmth of soul, a superabundant and

<sup>1</sup> See, at Bruges, the pictures of Hemling (fifteenth century). No paintings enable us to understand so well the ecclesiastical piety of the middle-age, which was altogether like that of the Buddhists.

splendid imagination, reveries, visions, artists, believers, founders, creators,—that is what such a form of intellect produces ; for to create we must have, as had Luther and Loyola, Michel Angelo and Shakspeare, an idea, not abstract, partial, and dry, but well defined, finished, sensible,—a true creation, which acts inwardly, and struggles to appear to the light. This was Europe's grand age, and the most notable epoch of human growth. To this day we live from its sap, we only carry on its pressure and efforts.

## II.

When human power is manifested so clearly and in such great works, it is no wonder if the ideal changes, and the old pagan idea reappears. It recurs, bringing with it the worship of beauty and vigour, first in Italy ; for this, of all countries in Europe, is the most pagan, and the nearest to the ancient civilisation ; thence in France and Spain, and Flanders,<sup>1</sup> and even in Germany ; and finally in England. How is it propagated ? What revolution of manners reunited mankind at this time, everywhere, under a sentiment which they had forgotten for fifteen hundred years ? Merely that their condition had improved, and they felt it. The idea ever expresses the actual situation, and the creatures of the imagination, like the conceptions of the mind, only manifest the state of society and the degree of its welfare ; there is a fixed connection between what man admires and what he is. While misery overwhelms him, while the decadence is visible, and hope shut out, he is inclined to curse his life on earth, and seek consolation in another sphere.

<sup>1</sup> Van Orley, Michel Coxcie, Franz Floris, the de Vos', the Sadclers, Crispin de Passa, and the artists of Nuremberg.

As soon as his sufferings are alleviated, his power made manifest, his prospects brightened, he begins once more to love the present life, to be self-confident, to love and praise energy, genius, all the effective faculties which labour to procure him happiness. About the twentieth year of Elizabeth's reign, the nobles gave up shield and two-handed sword for the rapier;<sup>1</sup> a little, almost imperceptible fact, yet vast, for it is like the change which sixty years ago, made us give up the sword at court, to leave us with our arms swinging about in our black coats. In fact, it was the close of feudal life, and the beginning of court-life, just as to-day court-life is at an end, and the democratic reign has begun. With the two-handed swords, heavy coats of mail, feudal keeps, private warfare, permanent disorder, all the scourges of the middle-age retired, and faded into the past. The English had done with the Wars of the Roses. They no longer ran the risk of being pillaged to-morrow for being rich, and hung the next day for being traitors; they have no further need to furbish up their armour, make alliances with powerful nations, lay in stores for the winter, gather together men-at-arms, scour the country to plunder and hang others.<sup>2</sup> The monarchy, in England as throughout Europe, establishes peace in the community,<sup>3</sup> and with peace appear the useful arts. Domestic comfort follows civil security; and man, better furnished in his home, better protected in his hamlet,

<sup>1</sup> The first carriage was in 1564. It caused much astonishment. Some said that it was "a great sea-shell brought from China;" others, "that it was a temple in which cannibals worshipped the devil."

<sup>2</sup> For a picture of this state of things, see Fenn's *Paston Letters*.

<sup>3</sup> Louis XI. in France, Ferdinand and Isabella in Spain, Henry VII. in England. In Italy the feudal regime ended earlier, by the establishment of republics and principalities.

takes pleasure in his life on earth, which he has changed, and means to change.

Toward the close of the fifteenth century<sup>1</sup> the impetus was given; commerce and the woollen trade made a sudden advance, and such an enormous one that corn-fields were changed into pasture-lands, "whereby the inhabitants of the said town (Manchester) have gotten and come into riches and wealthy livings,"<sup>2</sup> so that in 1553, 40,000 pieces of cloth were exported in English ships. It was already the England which we see to day, a land of green meadows, intersected by hedgerows, crowded with cattle, and abounding in ships—a manufacturing opulent land, with a people of beef-eating toilers, who enrich it while they enrich themselves. They improved agriculture to such an extent, that in half-a-century the produce of an acre was doubled.<sup>3</sup> They grew so rich, that at the beginning of the reign of Charles I. the Commons represented three times the wealth of the Upper House. The ruin of Antwerp by the Duke of Parma<sup>4</sup> sent to England "the third part of the merchants and manufacturers, who made silk, damask, stockings, taffetas, and serges." The defeat of the Armada and the decadence of Spain opened the seas to English merchants.<sup>5</sup> The toiling hive, who would dare, attempt, explore, act in unison, and always with profit, was

<sup>1</sup> 1488, Act of Parliament on Enclosures.

<sup>2</sup> A *Compendious Examination*, 1581, by William Strafford. Act of Parliament, 1541.

<sup>3</sup> Between 1377 and 1588 the increase was from two and a half to five millions.

<sup>4</sup> In 1585; Ludovic Guicciardini.

<sup>5</sup> Henry VIII. at the beginning of his reign had but one ship of war. Elizabeth sent out one hundred and fifty against the Armada. In 1553 was founded a company to trade with Russia. In 1578 Drake circumnavigated the globe. In 1600 the East India Company was founded.

about to reap its advantages and set out on its voyages, buzzing over the universe.

At the base and on the summit of society, in all ranks of life, in all grades of human condition, this new welfare became visible. In 1534, considering that the streets of London were "very noyous and foul, and in many places thereof very jeopardous to all people passing and repassing, as well on horseback as on foot," Henry VIII. began the paving of the city. New streets covered the open spaces where the young men used to run races and to wrestle. Every year the number of taverns, theatres, gambling rooms, bear-gardens, increased. Before the time of Elizabeth the country-houses of gentlemen were little more than straw-thatched cottages, plastered with the coarsest clay, lighted only by trellises. "Howbeit," says Harrison (1580), "such as be latellie builded are commonlie either of bricke or hard stone, or both; their roomes large and comelie, and houses of office further distant from their lodgings." The old wooden houses were covered with plaster, "which, beside the delectable whitenesse of the stuffe itselfe, is laied on so even and smoothlie, as nothing in my judgment can be done with more exactnesse."<sup>1</sup> This open admiration shows from what hovels they had escaped. Glass was at last employed for windows, and the bare walls were covered with hangings, on which visitors might see, with delight and astonishment, plants, animals, figures. They began to use stoves, and experienced the unwonted pleasure of being warm. Harrison notes three important changes which had taken place in the farm-houses of his time:

"One is, the multitude of chimnies lately erected, whereas in

<sup>1</sup> Nathan Drake, *Shakspeare and his Times*, 1817, i. v. 72 *et passim*.

their young daies there were not above two or three, if so manie, in most uplandishe townes of the realme. . . . The second is the great (although not generall), amendment of lodging, for our fathers (yea and we ourselves also) have lien full oft upon straw pallets, on rough mats covered onelie with a sheet, under coverlets made of dagswain, or hop-harlots, and a good round log under their heads, instead of a bolster or pillow. If it were so that the good man of the house, had within seven yeares after his marriage purchased a matteres or flockebed, and thereto a sacke of chaffe to rest his head upon, he thought himselfe to be as well lodged as the lord of the towne. . . . Pillowes (said they) were thought meet onelie for women in childbed. . . . The third thing is the exchange of vessell, as of treene platters into pewter, and wodden spoones into silver or tin; for so common was all sorts of treene stuff in old time, that a man should hardlie find four peeces of pewter (of which one was peradventure a salt) in a good farmers house."<sup>1</sup>

It is not possession, but acquisition, which gives men pleasure and sense of power; they observe sooner a small happiness, new to them, than a great happiness which is old. It is not when all is good, but when all is better, that they see the bright side of life, and are tempted to make a holiday of it. This is why at this period they did make a holiday of it, a splendid show, so like a picture that it fostered painting in Italy, so like a piece of acting, that it produced the drama in England. Now that the axe and sword of the civil wars had beaten down the independent nobility, and the abolition of the law of maintenance had destroyed the petty royalty of each great feudal baron, the lords quitted their sombre castles, battlemented fortresses, surrounded by stagnant water, pierced with narrow windows, a sort of stone breastplates of no use but to

<sup>1</sup> Nathan Drake, *Shakspeare and his Times*, i. v. 102.

preserve the life of their master. They flock into new palaces, with vaulted roofs and turrets, covered with fantastic and manifold ornaments, adorned with terraces and vast staircases, with gardens, fountains, statues, such as were the palaces of Henry VIII. and Elizabeth, half Gothic and half Italian,<sup>1</sup> whose convenience, splendour, and symmetry announced already habits of society and the taste for pleasure. They came to court and abandoned their old manners; the four meals which scarcely sufficed their former voracity were reduced to two; gentlemen soon became refined, placing their glory in the elegance and singularity of their amusements and their clothes. They dressed magnificently in splendid materials, with the luxury of men who rustle silk and make gold sparkle for the first time: doublets of scarlet satin; cloaks of sable, costing a thousand ducats; velvet shoes, embroidered with gold and silver, covered with rosettes and ribbons; boots with falling tops, from whence hung a cloud of lace, embroidered with figures of birds, animals, constellations, flowers in silver, gold, or precious stones; ornamented shirts costing ten pounds a piece. "It is a common thing to put a thousand goats and a hundred oxen on a coat, and to carry a whole manor on one's back."<sup>2</sup> The costumes of the time were like shrines. When Elizabeth died, they found three thousand dresses in her wardrobe. Need we speak of the monstrous ruffs of the ladies, their puffed out dresses, their stomachers stiff with diamonds? As a singular sign of the times, the men were more

<sup>1</sup> This was called the Tudor style. Under James I., in the hands of Inigo Jones, it became entirely Italian, approaching the antique.

<sup>2</sup> Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, 12th ed. 1821. Stubbes, *Anatomy of Abuses*, ed. Turnbull, 1886.



changeable and more bedecked than they. Harrison says :

" Such is our mutabilitie, that to daie there is none to the Spanish guise, to morrow the French toies are most fine and delectable, yer long no such apparell as that which is after the high Alman fashion, by and by the Turkish maner is generallie best liked of, otherwise the Morisco gowns, the Barbarian sleeves . . . and the short French breeches. . . . And as these fashions are diverse, so likewise it is a world to see the costliness and the curiositie ; the excesse and the vanitie ; the pompe and the braverie ; the change and the varietie ; and finallie, the ficklenesse and the follie that is in all degrees." <sup>1</sup>

Folly, it may have been, but poetry likewise. There was something more than puppyism in this masquerade of splendid costume. The overflow of inner sentiment found this issue, as also in drama and poetry. It was an artistic spirit which induced it. There was an incredible outgrowth of living forms from their brains. They acted like their engravers, who give us in their frontispieces a prodigality of fruits, flowers, active figures, animals, gods, and pour out and confuse the whole treasure of nature in every corner of their paper. They must enjoy the beautiful ; they would be happy through their eyes ; they perceive in consequence naturally the relief and energy of forms. From the accession of Henry VIII. to the death of James I. we find nothing but tournaments, processions, public entries, masquerades. First come the royal banquets, coronation displays, large and noisy pleasures of Henry VIII. Wolsey entertains him

" In so gorgeous a sort and costlie maner, that it was an heaven to behold. There wanted no dames or damosels meet or apt to

<sup>1</sup> Nathan Drake, *Shakespeare and his Times*, ii. 6, 87.

dance with the maskers, or to garnish the place for the time: then was there all kind of musike and harmonie, with fine voices both of men and children. On a time the king came suddenlie thither in a maske with a dozen maskers all in garments like shepheards, made of fine cloth of gold, and crimosin sattin paned, . . . having sixteene torch-bearers. . . . In came a new banket before the king wherein were served two hundred diverse dishes, of costlie devises and subtilities. Thus passed they forth the night with banketting, dansing, and other triumphs, to the great comfort of the king, and pleasant regard of the nobilitie there assembled." <sup>1</sup>

Count, if you can, the mythological entertainments, the theatrical receptions, the open-air operas played before Elizabeth, James, and their great lords.<sup>2</sup> At Kenilworth the pageants lasted ten days. There was everything; learned recreations, novelties, popular plays, sanguinary spectacles, coarse farces, juggling and feats of skill, allegories, mythologies, chivalric exhibitions, rustic and national commemorations. At the same time, in this universal outburst and sudden expanse, men become interested in themselves, find their life desirable, worthy of being represented and put on the stage complete; they play with it, delight in looking upon it, love its ups and downs, and make of it a work of art. The queen is received by a sibyl, then by giants of the time of Arthur, then by the Lady of the Lake, Sylvanus, Pomona, Ceres, and Bacchus, every divinity in turn presents her with the first fruits of his empire. Next day, a savage, dressed in moss and ivy, discourses before her with Echo in her praise. Thirteen bears are set fighting against

<sup>1</sup> Holinshed (1586), 1808, 6 vols. iii. 763 *et passim*.

<sup>2</sup> Holinshed, iii., *Reign of Henry VIII. Elizabeth and James Progresses*, by Nichols.

dogs. An Italian acrobat performs wonderful feats before the whole assembly. A rustic marriage takes place before the queen, then a sort of comic fight amongst the peasants of Coventry, who represent the defeat of the Danes. As she is returning from the chase, Triton, rising from the lake, prays her, in the name of Neptune, to deliver the enchanted lady, pursued by a cruel knight, *Syr Bruce sauns Pitee*. Presently the lady appears, surrounded by nymphs, followed close by Proteus, who is borne by an enormous dolphin. Concealed in the dolphin, a band of musicians with a chorus of ocean-deities, sing the praise of the powerful, beautiful, chaste queen of England.<sup>1</sup> You perceive that comedy is not confined to the theatre; the great of the realm and the queen herself become actors. The cravings of the imagination are so keen, that the court becomes a stage. Under James I., every year, on Twelfth-day, the queen, the chief ladies and nobles, played a piece called a Masque, a sort of allegory combined with dances, heightened in effect by decorations and costumes of great splendour, of which the mythological paintings of Rubens can alone give an idea:—

“The attire of the lords was from the antique Greek statues. On their heads they wore Persic crowns, that were with scrolls of gold plate turned outward, and wreathed about with a carnation and silver net-lawn. Their bodies were of carnation cloth of silver; to express the naked, in manner of the Greek thorax, girt under the breasts with a broad belt of cloth of gold, fastened with jewels; the mantles were of coloured silke; the first, sky-colour; the second, pearl-colour; the third, flame colour; the fourth, tawny. The ladies attire was of white cloth of silver, wrought with Juno's birds and fruits; a loose under garment,

<sup>1</sup> Laneham's Entertainment at Killingworth Castle, 1575. *Nichol's Progresses*, vol. i. London 1788.

full gathered, of carnation, striped with silver, and parted with a golden zone; beneath that, another flowing garment, of watchet cloth of silver, laced with gold; their hair carelessly bound under the circle of a rare and rich coronet, adorned with all variety, and choice of jewels; from the top of which flowed a transparent veil, down to the ground. Their shoes were azure and gold, set with rubies and diamonds."<sup>1</sup>

I abridge the description, which is like a fairy tale. Fancy that all these costumes, this glitter of materials, this sparkling of diamonds, this splendour of nudities, was displayed daily at the marriage of the great, to the bold sounds of a pagan epithalamium. Think of the feasts which the Earl of Carlisle introduced, where was served first of all a table loaded with sumptuous viands, as high as a man could reach, in order to remove it presently, and replace it by another similar table. This prodigality of magnificence, these costly follies, this unbridling of the imagination, this intoxication of eye and ear, this comedy played by the lords of the realm, showed, like the pictures of Rubens, Jordaens, and their Flemish contemporaries, so open an appeal to the senses, so complete a return to nature, that our chilled and gloomy age is scarcely able to imagine it.<sup>2</sup>

### III.

To vent the feelings, to satisfy the heart and eyes, to set free boldly on all the roads of existence the pack of appetites and instincts, this was the craving which the manners of the time betrayed. It was "merry England,"

<sup>1</sup> Ben Jonson's works, ed. Gifford, 1816, 9 vols. *Masque of Hymen*, vol. vii. 76.

<sup>2</sup> Certain private letters also describe the court of Elizabeth as a place where there was little piety or practice of religion, and where all enormities reigned in the highest degree.

as they called it then. It was not yet stern and constrained. It expanded widely, freely, and rejoiced to find itself so expanded. No longer at court only was the drama found, but in the village. Strolling companies betook themselves thither, and the country folk supplied any deficiencies, when necessary. Shakspeare saw, before he depicted them, stupid fellows, carpenters, joiners, bellows-menders, play *Pyramus and Thisbe*, represent the lion roaring as gently as any sucking dove, and the wall, by stretching out their hands. Every holiday was a pageant, in which townspeople, workmen, and children bore their parts. They were actors by nature. When the soul is full and fresh, it does not express its ideas by reasonings; it plays and figures them; it mimics them; that is the true and original language, the children's tongue, the speech of artists, of invention, and of joy. It is in this manner they please themselves with songs and feasting, on all the symbolic holidays with which tradition has filled the year.<sup>1</sup> On the Sunday after Twelfth-night the labourers parade the streets, with their shirts over their coats, decked with ribbons, dragging a plough to the sound of music, and dancing a sword-dance; on another day they draw in a cart a figure made of ears of corn, with songs, flutes, and drums; on another, Father Christmas and his company; or else they enact the history of Robin Hood, the bold archer, around the May-pole, or the legend of Saint George and the Dragon. We might occupy half a volume in describing all these holidays, such as Harvest Home, All Saints, Martinmas, Sheepshearing, above all Christmas, which lasted twelve days, and sometimes six weeks. They eat and drink, junket,

<sup>1</sup> Nathan Drake, *Shakspeare and his Times*, chap. v. and vi.

tumble about, kiss the girls, ring the bells, satiate themselves with noise : coarse drunken revels, in which man is an unbridled animal, and which are the incarnation of natural life. The Puritans made no mistake about that. Stubbes says :

"First, all the wilde heades of the parishe, conventying together, chuse them a ground capitaine of mischeef, whan they innoble with the title of my Lorde of Misserule, and hym they crown with great solemnitie, and adopt for their kyng. This kyng anoynted, chuseth for the twentie, fourtie, three score, or a hundred lustie guttes like to hymself to waite uppon his lordely maiestie. . . . Then have they their hobbie horses, dragons, and other antiques, together with their baudie pipers and thunderyng drommers, to strike up the devilles daunce withall : then marche these heathen companie towards the churche and churche-yarde, their pipers pipyng, their drommers thonderyng, their stumpes dauncyng, their belles rynglyng, their handkercheefes swyngyng about their heades like madmen, their hobbie horses and other monsters skirmishyng amongst the throng ; and in this sorte they goe to the churche (though the minister bee at praier or preachyng), dauncyng, and swingyng their handkercheefes over their heades, in the churche, like devilles incarnate, with such a confused noise, that no man can heare his owne voice. Then the foolishe people they looke, they stare, they laugh, they fleere, and mount upon formes and pewes, to see these goodly pageauntes, solemnized in this sort. Then after this, aboute the churche they goe againe and againe, and so forthe into the churche-yarde, where they have commonly their sommer haules, their bowers, arbours, and banquettyng houses set up, wherein they feaste, banquet, and daunce all that daie, and peradventure all that night too. And thus these terrestriall furies spend the Sabbath daie ! . . . An other sorte of fantasticall fooles bringe to these helhoundes (the Lorde of Misrule and his complices) some bread, some good ale, some newe cheese, some olde cheese, some custardes, some cakes, some flaunes, some tartes, some creame, some meate, some one thing, some an other."

He continues thus :

"Against Maie, every pariahe, towne and village assemble themselves together, bothe men, women, and children, olde and yong, even all indifferently ; they goe to the woodes where they spende all the night in pleasant pastymes, and in the mornnyng they returne, bringing with them birch, bowes, and branches of trees, to deck their assemblies withall. But their cheefest iewell they bringe from thence is their Maie poole, whiche they bring home with great veneration, as thus : They have twenty or fourtie yoke of oxen, every ox havynge a sweete nosegaie of flowers tyed on the tippe of his hornes, and these oxen, drawe home this Maie poole (this stinckyng idoll rather) . . . and thus beyng reared up, they strawe the grounde aboute, binde greene boughes about it, sett up sommer haules, bowers, and arbours hard by it ; and then fall they to banquet and feast, to leape and daunce aboute it, as the heathen people did at the dedication of their idolles. . . . Of a hundred maides goyng to the woode over night, there have scarcely the third parte returned home againe undefiled."<sup>1</sup>

"On Shrove Tuesday," says another,<sup>2</sup> "at the sound of a bell, the folk become insane, thousands at a time, and forget all decency and common sense. . . . It is to Satan and the devil that they pay homage and do sacrifice to in these abominable pleasures." It is in fact to nature, to the ancient Pan, to Freya, to Hertha, her sisters, to the old Teutonic deities who survived the middle-age. At this period, in the temporary decay of Christianity, and the sudden advance of corporal well-being, man adored himself, and there endured no life within him but that of paganism.

<sup>1</sup> Stubbes, *Anatomie of Abuses*, p. 168 *et passim*.

<sup>2</sup> Hentzner's *Travels in England* (Bentley's translation). He thought that the figure carried about in the Harvest Home represented Ceres.

## IV.

To sum up, observe the process of ideas at this time. A few sectarians, chiefly in the towns and of the people, clung gloomily to the Bible. But the court and the men of the world sought their teachers and their heroes from pagan Greece and Rome. About 1490<sup>1</sup> they began to read the classics; one after the other they translated them; it was soon the fashion to read them in the original. Queen Elizabeth, Jane Grey, the Duchess of Norfolk, the Countess of Arundel, and many other ladies, were conversant with Plato, Xenophon, and Cicero in the original, and appreciated them. Gradually, by an insensible change, men were raised to the level of the great and healthy minds who had freely handled ideas of all kinds fifteen centuries before. They comprehended not only their language, but their thought; they did not repeat lessons from, but held conversations with them; they were their equals, and found in them intellects as manly as their own. For they were not scholastic cavillers, miserable compilers, repulsive pedants, like the professors of jargon whom the middle-age had set over them, like gloomy Duns Scotus, whose leaves Henry VIII's Visitors scattered to the winds. They were gentlemen, statesmen, the most polished and best educated men in the world, who knew how to speak, and drew their ideas not from books, but from things, living ideas, and which entered of themselves into living souls. Across the train of hooded schoolmen and sordid cavillers the two adult and thinking ages were united, and the moderns, silencing the infan-

<sup>1</sup> Warton, vol. ii. sect. 35. Before 1600 all the great poets were translated into English, and between 1550 and 1616 all the great historians of Greece and Rome. Lyly in 1500 first taught Greek in public.



tine or snuffing voices of the middle-age, condescended only to converse with the noble ancients. They accepted their gods, at least they understand them, and keep them by their side. In poems, festivals, on hangings, almost in all ceremonies, they appear, not restored by pedantry merely, but kept alive by sympathy, and endowed by the arts with a life as flourishing and almost as profound as that of their earliest birth. After the terrible night of the middle-age, and the dolorous legends of spirits and the damned, it was a delight to see again Olympus shining upon us from Greece; its heroic and beautiful deities once more ravishing the heart of men; they raised and instructed this young world by speaking to it the language of passion and genius; and this age of strong deeds, free sensuality, bold invention, had only to follow its own bent, in order to discover in them its masters and the eternal promoters of liberty and beauty.

Nearer still was another paganism, that of Italy; the more seductive because more modern, and because it circulates fresh sap in an ancient stock; the more attractive, because more sensuous and present, with its worship of force and genius, of pleasure and voluptuousness. The rigorists knew this well, and were shocked at it. Ascham writes:

"These bee the enchantementes of Circes, brought out of Italie to marre mens maners in England; much, by example of ill life, but more by preceptes of fonde bookes, of late translated out of Italian into English, sold in every shop in London. . . . There bee moe of these ungratious bookes set out in Printe wythin these fewe monethes, than have bene sene in England many score yeares before. . . . Than they have in more reverence the triumphes of Petrarche: than the Genesis of Moses: They

make more account of Tullies offices, than S. Pauls epistles : of a tale in Bocace than a storie of the Bible."<sup>1</sup>

In fact, at that time Italy clearly led in everything, and civilisation was to be drawn thence, as from its spring. What is this civilisation which is thus imposed on the whole of Europe, whence every science and every elegance comes, whose laws are obeyed in every court, in which Surrey, Sidney, Spenser, Shakspeare sought their models and their materials? It was pagan in its elements and its birth; in its language, which is but Latin, hardly changed; in its Latin traditions and recollections, which no gap has interrupted; in its constitution, whose old municipal life first led and absorbed the feudal life; in the genius of its race, in which energy and joy always abounded. More than a century before other nations,—from the time of Petrarch, Rienzi, Boccaccio,—the Italians began to recover the lost antiquity, to set free the manuscripts buried in the dungeons of France and Germany, to restore, interpret, comment upon, study the ancients, to make themselves Latin in heart and mind, to compose in prose and verse with the polish of Cicero and Virgil, to hold sprightly converse and intellectual pleasures as the ornament and the fairest flower of life.<sup>2</sup> They adopt not merely the externals of the life of the ancients, but its very essence, that is, preoccupation with the present life, forgetfulness of the future, the appeal to the senses, the

<sup>1</sup> Ascham, *The Scholemaster* (1570), ed. Arber, 1870, first book, 78 *et passim*.

<sup>2</sup> Ma il vero e principal ornamento dell' animo in ciascuno penso io che siano le lettere, benchè i Franchesi solamente conoscano la nobilità dell'arme . . . et tutti i litterati tengon per villissimi huomini. Castiglione, *il Cortegiano*, ed. 1585, p. 112.

renunciation of Christianity. "We must enjoy," sang their first poet, Lorenzo de Medici, in his pastorals and triumphal songs: "there is no certainty of to-morrow." In Pulci the mocking incredulity breaks out, the bold and sensual gaiety, all the audacity of the free-thinkers, who kicked aside in disgust the worn-out monkish frock of the middle age. It was he who, in a jesting poem, puts at the beginning of each canto a Hosanna, an *In principio*, or a sacred text from the mass-book.<sup>1</sup> When he had been inquiring what the soul was, and how it entered the body, he compared it to jam covered up in white bread quite hot. What would become of it in the other world? "Some people think they will there discover becafico's, plucked ortolans, excellent wine, good beds, and therefore they follow the monks, walking behind them. As for us, dear friend, we shall go into the black valley, where we shall hear no more Alleluias." If you wish for a more serious thinker, listen to the great patriot, the Thucydides of the age, Machiavelli, who, contrasting Christianity and paganism, says that the first places "supreme happiness in humility, abjection, contempt for human things, while the other makes the sovereign good consist in greatness of soul, force of body, and all the qualities which make men to be feared." Whereon he boldly concludes that Christianity teaches man "to support evils, and not to do great deeds;" he discovers in that inner weakness the cause of all oppressions; declares that "the wicked saw that they could tyrannise without fear over men, who, in order to get to paradise, were more disposed to suffer than to avenge injuries." Through such sayings, in spite of his con-

<sup>1</sup> See Burchard (the Pope's Steward), account of the festival at which Lucretia Borgia was present. *Letters of Aretinus. Life of Cellini*, etc.

strained genuflexions, we can see which religion he prefers. The ideal to which all efforts were turning, on which all thoughts depended, and which completely raised this civilisation, was the strong and happy man, possessing all the powers to accomplish his wishes, and disposed to use them in pursuit of his happiness.

If you would see this idea in its grandest operation, you must seek it in the arts, such as Italy made them and carried throughout Europe, raising or transforming the national schools with such originality and vigour, that all art likely to survive is derived from hence, and the population of living figures with which they have covered our walls, denotes, like Gothic architecture or French tragedy, a unique epoch of human intelligence. The attenuated mediæval Christ—a miserable, distorted, and bleeding earth-worm; the pale and ugly Virgin—a poor old peasant woman, fainting beside the cross of her Son; ghastly martyrs, dried up with fasts, with entranced eyes; knotty-fingered saints with sunken chests,—all the touching or lamentable visions of the middle-age have vanished: the train of godheads which are now developed show nothing but flourishing frames, noble, regular features, and fine easy gestures; the names, the names only, are Christian. The new Jesus is a “crucified Jupiter,” as Pulci called him; the Virgins which Raphael sketched naked, before covering them with garments,<sup>1</sup> are beautiful girls, quite earthly, related to the Fornarina. The saints which Michel Angelo arranges and contorts in heaven in his picture of the Last Judgment are an assembly of athletes, capable of fighting well and daring much. A martyr-

<sup>1</sup> See his sketches at Oxford, and those of Fra Bartolomeo at Florence. See also the Martyrdom of St. Laurence, by Baccio Bandinelli.

dom, like that of Saint Laurence, is a fine ceremony in which a beautiful young man, without clothing, lies amidst fifty men dressed and grouped as in an ancient gymnasium. Is there one of them who had macerated himself? Is there one who had thought with anguish and tears of the judgment of God, who had worn down and subdued his flesh, who had filled his heart with the sadness and sweetness of the gospel? They are too vigorous for that, they are in too robust health; their clothes fit them too well; they are too ready for prompt and energetic action. We might make of them strong soldiers or superb courtesans, admirable in a pageant or at a ball. So, all that the spectator accords to their halo of glory, is a bow or a sign of the cross; after which his eyes find pleasure in them; they are there simply for the enjoyment of the eyes. What the spectator feels at the sight of a Florentine Madonna, is the splendid creature, whose powerful body and fine growth bespeak her race and her vigour; the artist did not paint moral expression as nowadays, the depth of a soul tortured and refined by three centuries of culture. They confine themselves to the body, to the extent even of speaking enthusiastically of the spinal column itself, "which is magnificent;" of the shoulder-blades, which in the movements of the arm "produce an admirable effect." "You will next draw the bone which is situated between the hips. It is very fine, and is called the sacrum."<sup>1</sup> The important point with them is to represent the nude well. Beauty with them is that of the complete skeleton, sinews which are linked together and tightened, the thighs which support the trunk, the strong chest breathing freely, the pliant neck. What

<sup>1</sup> Benvenuto Cellini, *Principles of the Art of Design*.

a pleasure to be naked ! How good it is in the full light to rejoice in a strong body, well-formed muscles, a spirited and bold soul ! The splendid goddesses reappear in their primitive nudity, not dreaming that they are nude ; you see from the tranquillity of their look, the simplicity of their expression, that they have always been thus, and that shame has not yet reached them. The soul's life is not here contrasted, as amongst us, with the body's life ; the one is not so lowered and degraded, that we dare not show its actions and functions ; they do not hide them ; man does not dream of being all spirit. They rise, as of old, from the luminous sea, with their rearing steeds tossing up their manes, champing the bit, inhaling the briny savour, whilst their companions wind the sounding-shell ; and the spectators,<sup>1</sup> accustomed to handle the sword, to combat naked with the dagger or double-handled blade, to ride on perilous roads, sympathise with the proud shape of the bended back, the effort of the arm about to strike, the long quiver of the muscles which, from neck to heel, swell out, to brace a man, or to throw him.

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Cellini*. Compare also these exercises which Castiglione prescribes for a well-educated man, in his *Cortegiano*, ed. 1585, p. 55:—  
 “ Peró voglio che il nostro cortegiano sia perfetto cavaliere d'ogni sella. . . . Et perchè degli Italiani è peculiar laude il cavalcare benè alla brida, il maneggiar con raggione massimamente cavalli aspri, il corre lance, il giostrare, sia in questo de miglior Italiani. . . . Nel torneare, tener un passo, combattere una sbarra, sia buono tra il miglior francesi. . . . Nel giocare a canne, correr torri, lanciar haste e dardi, sia tra Spagnuoli eccellente . . . . Conveniente è ancor sapere saltare, e correre ; . . . . ancor nobile exercitio il gioco di palla. . . . Non di minor laude estime il voltegiar a cavallo.”

## § 2. POETRY.

## I.

Transplanted into different races and climates, this paganism receives from each, distinct features and a distinct character. In England it becomes English; the English Renaissance is the Renaissance of the Saxon genius. Invention recommences; and to invent is to express one's genius. A Latin race can only invent by expressing Latin ideas; a Saxon race by expressing Saxon ideas; and we shall find in the new civilisation and poetry, descendants of Cædmon and Adhelm, of Piers Plowman, and Robin Hood.

## II.

Old Puttenham says:

"In the latter end of the same king (Henry the eighth) reigne, sprong up a new company of courtly makers, of whom Sir Thomas Wyat th' elder and Henry Earle of Surrey were the two chieftaines, who having travailed into Italie, and there tasted the sweete and stately measures and stile of the Italian Poesie, as novices newly crept out of the schooles of Dante, Arioste, and Petrarch, they greatly polished our rude and homely maner of vulgar Poesie, from that it had bene before, and for that cause may justly be sayd the first reformers of our English meetre and stile."<sup>1</sup>

Not that their style was very original, or openly exhibits the new spirit: the middle-age is nearly ended, but not quite. By their side Andrew Borde, John Bale, John Heywood, Skelton himself, repeat the platitudes of the old poetry and the coarseness of the old style. Their manners, hardly refined, were still half

<sup>1</sup> Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, ed. Arber, 1869, book i. ch. 21, p. 74.

feudal; on the field, before Landrecies, the English commander wrote a friendly letter to the French governor of T rouanne, to ask him "if he had not some gentlemen disposed to break a lance in honour of the ladies," and promised to send six champions to meet them. Parades, combats, wounds, challenges, love, appeals to the judgment of God, penances,—all these are found in the life of Surrey as in a chivalric romance. A great lord, an earl, a relative of the king, who had figured in processions and ceremonies, had made war, commanded fortresses, ravaged countries, mounted to the assault, fallen in the breach, had been saved by his servant, magnificent, sumptuous, irritable, ambitious, four times imprisoned, finally beheaded. At the coronation of Anne Boleyn he wore the fourth sword; at the marriage of Anne of Cleves he was one of the challengers at the jousts. Denounced and placed in durance, he offered to fight in his shirt against an armed adversary. Another time he was put in prison for having eaten flesh in Lent. No wonder if this prolongation of chivalric manners brought with it a prolongation of chivalric poetry; if in an age which had known Petrarch, poets displayed the sentiments of Petrarch. Lord Berners, Sackville, Sir Thomas Wyatt, and Surrey in the first rank, were like Petrarch, plaintive and platonic lovers. It was pure love to which Surrey gave expression; for his lady, the beautiful Geraldine, like Beatrice and Laura, was an ideal personage, and a child of thirteen years.

And yet, amid this languor of mystical tradition, a personal feeling had sway. In this spirit which imitated, and that badly at times, which still groped for an outlet and now and then admitted into its polished stanzas the old, simple expressions and stale metaphors of



heralds of arms and trouvères, there was already visible the Northern melancholy, the inner and gloomy emotion. This feature, which presently, at the finest moment of its richest blossom, in the splendid expansiveness of natural life, spreads a sombre tint over the poetry of Sidney, Spenser, Shakspeare, already in the first poet separates this pagan yet Teutonic world from the other, wholly voluptuous, which in Italy, with lively and refined irony, had no taste, except for art and pleasure. Surrey translated the Ecclesiastes into verse. Is it not singular, at this early hour, in this rising dawn, to find such a book in his hand? A disenchantment, a sad or bitter dreaminess, an innate consciousness of the vanity of human things, are never lacking in this country and in this race; the inhabitants support life with difficulty, and know how to speak of death. Surrey's finest verses bear witness thus soon to his serious bent, this instinctive and grave philosophy. He records his griefs, regretting his beloved Wyatt, his friend Clère, his companion the young Duke of Richmond, all dead in their prime. Alone, a prisoner at Windsor, he recalls the happy days they have passed together :

“So cruel prison how could betide, alas,  
As proud Windsor, where I in lust and joy,  
With a Kinges son, my childish years did pass,  
In greater feast than Priam's son of Troy.

Where each sweet place returns a taste full sour,  
The large green courts, where we were wont to hove,  
With eyes cast up into the Maiden's tower,  
And easy sighs, such as folk draw in love.

The stately seats, the ladies bright of hue.  
The dances short, long tales of great delight,

With words and looks, that tigers could but rue ;  
 Where each of us did plead the other's right.  
 The palme-play, where, despoiled for the game,  
 With dazed eyes oft we by gleams of love  
 Have miss'd the ball, and got sight of our dame,  
 To bait her eyes, which kept the leads above . . .  
 The secret thoughts, imparted with such trust ;  
 The wanton talk, the divers change of play ;  
 The friendship sworn, each promise kept so just,  
 Wherewith we past the winter night away.  
 And with his thought the blood forsakes the face ;  
 The tears berain my cheeks of deadly hue :  
 The which, as soon as sobbing sighs, alas !  
 Up-supped have, thus I my plaint renew :  
 O place of bliss ! renewer of my woes !  
 Give me account, where is my noble fere ?  
 Whom in thy walls thou dost each night enclose ;  
 To other lief ; but unto me most dear.  
 Echo, alas ! that doth my sorrow rue,  
 Returns thereto a hollow sound of plaint."<sup>1</sup>

So in love, it is the sinking of a weary soul, to which he gives vent :

"For all things having life, sometime hath quiet rest ;  
 The bearing ass, the drawing ox, and every other beast ;  
 The peasant, and the post, that serves a' all assays ;  
 The ship-boy, and the galley-slave, have time to take their ease ;  
 Save I, alas ! whom care of force doth so constrain,  
 To wail the day, and wake the night, continually in pain,  
 From pensiveness to plaint, from plaint to bitter tears,  
 From tears to painful plaint again ; and thus my life it wears."

<sup>1</sup> Surrey's *Poems*, Pickering, 1831, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* "The faithful lover declareth his pains and his uncertain joys, and with only hope recomforteth his woful heart," p. 53.

That which brings joy to others brings him grief :

“ The soote season, that bud and bloom forth brings,  
 With green hath clad the hill, and eke the vale.  
 The nightingale with feathers new she sings ;  
 The turtle to her mate hath told her tale.  
 Summer is come, for every spray now springs ;  
 The hart has hung his old head on the pale ;  
 The buck in brake his winter coat he flings ;  
 The fishes flete with new repaired scale ;  
 The adder all her slough away she slings ;  
 The swift swallow pursueth the flies smale ;  
 The busy bee her honey now she mings ;  
 Winter is worn that was the flowers' bale.  
 And thus I see among these pleasant things  
 Each care decays, and yet my sorrow springs ! ”<sup>1</sup>

For all that, he will love on to his last sigh.

“ Yea, rather die a thousand times, than once to false my faith  
 And if my feeble corpse, through weight of woful smart  
 Do fail, or faint, my will it is that still she keep my heart.  
 And when this carcass here to earth shall be refard,  
 I do bequeath my wearied ghost to serve her afterward.”<sup>2</sup>

An infinite love, and pure as Petrarch's ; and she is worthy of it. In the midst of all these studied or imitated verses, an admirable portrait stands out, the simplest and truest we can imagine, a work of the heart now, and not of the memory, which behind the Madonna of chivalry shows the English wife, and beyond feudal gallantry domestic bliss. Surrey alone, restless, hears within him the firm tones of a good friend, a sincere counsellor, Hope, who speaks to him thus :

<sup>1</sup> Surrey's *Poems*. “ Description of Spring, wherein every thing renews, save only the lover,” p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 54.

" For I assure thee, even by oath,  
And thereon take my hand and troth,  
That she is one the worthiest,  
The truest, and the faithfulest ;  
The gentlest and the meekest of mind  
That here on earth a man may find :  
And if that love and truth were gone,  
In her it might be found alone.  
For in her mind no thought there is,  
But how she may be true, I wis ;  
And tenders thee and all thy heale,  
And wishes both thy health and weal ;  
And loves thee even as far forth than  
As any woman may a man ;  
And is thine own, and so she says ;  
And cares for thee ten thousand ways.  
Of thee she speaks, on thee she thinks ;  
With thee she eats, with thee she drinks ;  
With thee she talks, with thee she moans ;  
With thee she sighs, with thee she groans ;  
With thee she says ' Farewell mine own !'  
When thou, God knows, full far art gone.  
And even, to tell thee all aright,  
To thee she says full oft ' Good night !'  
And names thee oft her own most dear,  
Her comfort, weal, and all her cheer ;  
And tells her pillow all the tale  
How thou hast done her woe and bale ;  
And how she longs, and plains for thee,  
And says, ' Why art thou so from me ?'  
Am I not she that loves thee best !  
Do I not wish thine ease and rest ?  
Seek I not how I may thee please ?  
Why art thou then so from thine ease ?  
If I be she for whom thou carest,  
For whom in torments so thou farest,

Alas ! thou knowest to find me here,  
 Where I remain thine own most dear.  
 Thine own most true, thine own most just,  
 Thine own that loves thee still, and must ;  
 Thine own that cares alone for thee,  
 As thou, I think, dost care for me ;  
 And even the woman, she alone,  
 That is full bent to be thine own."<sup>1</sup>

Certainly it is of his wife<sup>2</sup> that he is thinking here, not of an imaginary Laura. The poetic dream of Petrarch has become the exact picture of deep and perfect conjugal affection, such as yet survives in England ; such as all the poets, from the authoress of the *Nut-brown Maid* to Dickens,<sup>3</sup> have never failed to represent.

### III.

An English Petrarch : no juster title could be given to Surrey, for it expresses his talent as well as his disposition. In fact, like Petrarch, the oldest of the humanists, and the earliest exact writer of the modern tongue, Surrey introduces a new style, the manly style, which marks a great change of the mind ; for this new form of writing is the result of superior reflection, which, governing the primitive impulse, calculates and selects with an end in view. At last the intellect has grown capable of self-criticism, and actually criticises itself. It corrects its unconsidered works, infantine and incoherent, at once incomplete and superabundant ;

<sup>1</sup> Surrey's *Poems*. "A description of the restless state of the lover when absent from the mistress of his heart," p. 78.

<sup>2</sup> In another piece, *Complaint on the Absence of her Lover being upon the Sea*, he speaks in direct terms of his wife, almost as affectionately.

<sup>3</sup> Greene, Beaumont and Fletcher, Webster, Shakespeare, Ford, Otway, Richardson, De Foe, Fielding, Dickens, Thackeray, etc.

it strengthens and binds them together; it prunes and perfects them; it takes from them the master idea, to set it free and to show it clearly. This is what Surrey does, and his education had prepared him for it; for he had studied Virgil as well as Petrarch, and translated two books of the *Æneid*, almost verse for verse. In such company a man cannot but select his ideas and connect his phrases. After their example, Surrey gauges the means of striking the attention, assisting the intelligence, avoiding fatigue and weariness. He looks forward to the last line whilst writing the first. He keeps the strongest word for the last, and shows the symmetry of ideas by the symmetry of phrases. Sometimes he guides the intelligence by a continuous series of contrasts to the final image; a kind of sparkling casket, in which he means to deposit the idea which he carries, and to which he directs our attention from the first.<sup>1</sup> Sometimes he leads his reader to the close of a long flowery description, and then suddenly checks him with a sorrowful phrase.<sup>2</sup> He arranges his process, and knows how to produce effects; he uses even classical expressions, in which two substantives, each supported by its adjective, are balanced on either side of the verb.<sup>3</sup> He collects his phrases in harmonious periods, and does not neglect the delight of the ears any more than of the mind. By his inversions he adds force to his ideas, and weight to his argument. He selects elegant or noble terms, rejects idle words and redundant phrases. Every epithet contains an idea, every metaphor a sentiment. There is eloquence in

<sup>1</sup> *The Frailty and Hurtfulness of Beauty.*

<sup>2</sup> *Description of Spring. A Vow to love faithfully.*

<sup>3</sup> *Complaint of the Lover disdained.*

the regular development of his thought; music in the sustained accent of his verse.

Such is the new-born art. Those who have ideas, now possess an instrument capable of expressing them. Like the Italian painters, who in fifty years had introduced or discovered all the technical tricks of the brush, English writers, in half-a-century, introduce or discover all the artifices of language, period, elevated style, heroic verse, soon the grand stanza, so effectually, that a little later the most perfect versifiers, Dryden, and Pope himself, says Dr. Nott, will add scarce anything to the rules, invented or applied, which were employed in the earliest efforts.<sup>1</sup> Even Surrey is too near to these authors, too constrained in his models, not sufficiently free; he has not yet felt the fiery blast of the age; we do not find in him a bold genius, an impassioned writer capable of wide expansion, but a courtier, a lover of elegance, who, penetrated by the beauties of two finished literatures, imitates Horace and the chosen masters of Italy, corrects and polishes little morsels, aims at speaking perfectly fine language. Amongst semi-barbarians he wears a full dress becomingly. Yet he does not wear it completely at his ease: he keeps his eyes too exclusively on his models, and does not venture on frank and free gestures. He is sometimes as a school-boy, makes too great use of 'hot' and 'cold,' wounds and martyrdom. Although a lover, and a genuine one, he thinks too much that he must be so in Petrarch's manner, that his phrase must be balanced and his image kept up. I had almost said that, in his sonnets of disappointed love, he thinks less often of the strength of love than of the beauty of his

<sup>1</sup> Surrey, ed. Nott.

writing. He has conceits, ill-chosen words ; he uses trite expressions ; he relates how Nature, having formed his lady, broke the mould ; he assigns parts to Cupid and Venus ; he employs the old machinery of the troubadours and the ancients, like a clever man who wishes to pass for a gallant. At first scarce any mind dares be quite itself : when a new art arises, the first artist listens not to his heart, but to his masters, and asks himself at every step whether he be setting foot on solid ground, or whether he is not stumbling.

## IV.

Insensibly the growth became complete, and at the end of the century all was changed. A new, strange, overloaded style had been formed, destined to remain in force until the Restoration, not only in poetry, but also in prose, even in ceremonial speech and theological discourse,<sup>1</sup> so suitable to the spirit of the age, that we meet with it at the same time throughout the whole of Europe, in Ronsard and d'Aubigné, in Calderon, Gongora, and Marini. In 1580 appeared *Euphues, the Anatomy of Wit*, by Lyly, which was its text-book, its masterpiece, its caricature, and was received with universal admiration.<sup>2</sup> "Our nation," says Edward Blount, "are in his debt for a new English which hee taught them. All our ladies were then his scollers ; and that beautie in court who could not parley Euphuesme was as little regarded as shee which now there speakes not French." The ladies knew the phrases

<sup>1</sup> The Speaker's address to Charles II. on his restoration. Compare it with the speech of M. de Fontanes under the Empire. In each case it was the close of a literary epoch. Read for illustration the speech before the University of Oxford, *Athenæ Oxonienses*, i. 198.

<sup>2</sup> His second work, *Euphues and his England*, appeared in 1581.



of Euphues by heart: strange, studied, and refined phrases, enigmatical; whose author seems of set purpose to seek the least natural expressions and the most far-fetched, full of exaggeration and antithesis, in which mythological allusions, reminiscences from alchemy, botanical and astronomical metaphors, all the rubbish and medley of learning, travels, mannerism, roll in a flood of conceits and comparisons. Do not judge it by the grotesque picture that Walter Scott drew of it. Sir Piercie Shafton is but a pedant, a cold and dull copyist; it is its warmth and originality which give this style a true force and an accent of its own. You must conceive it, not as dead and inert, such as we have it to-day in old books, but springing from the lips of ladies and young lords in pearl-bedecked doublet, quickened by their vibrating voices, their laughter, the flash of their eyes, the motion of their hands as they played with the hilt of their swords or with their satin cloaks. They were full of life, their heads filled to overflowing; and they amused themselves, as our sensitive and eager artists do, at their ease in the studio. They did not speak to convince or be understood, but to satisfy their excited imagination, to expend their overflowing wit.<sup>1</sup> They played with words, twisted, put them out of shape, enjoyed sudden views, strong contrasts, which they produced one after another, ever and anon, and in great quantities. They cast flower on flower, tinsel on tinsel: everything sparkling delighted them; they gilded and embroidered and plumed their language like their garments. They cared nothing for clearness, order, common sense; it was a festival and a madness; absurdity pleased them. They knew nothing more tempting than

<sup>1</sup> See Shakspeare's young men. Mercutio especially.

a carnival of splendours and oddities; all was huddled together: a coarse gaiety, a tender and sad word, a pastoral, a sounding flourish of unmeasured boasting, a gambol of a Jack-pudding. Eyes, ears, all the senses, eager and excited, are satisfied by this jingle of syllables, the display of fine high-coloured words, the unexpected clash of droll or familiar images, the majestic roll of well-poised periods. Every one had his own oaths, his elegances, his style. "One would say," remarks Heylyn, "that they are ashamed of their mother-tongue, and do not find it sufficiently varied to express the whims of their mind." We no longer imagine this inventiveness, this boldness of fancy, this ceaseless fertility of nervous sensibility: there was no genuine prose at that time; the poetic flood swallowed it up. A word was not an exact symbol, as with us; a document which from cabinet to cabinet carried a precise thought. It was part of a complete action, a little drama; when they read it, they did not take it by itself, but imagined it with the intonation of a hissing and shrill voice, with the puckering of the lips, the knitting of the brows, and the succession of pictures which crowd behind it, and which it calls forth in a flash of lightning. Each one mimics and pronounces it in his own style, and impresses his own soul upon it. It was a song, which, like the poet's verse, contains a thousand things besides the literal sense, and manifests the depth, warmth, and sparkling of the source whence it flowed. For in that time, even when the man was feeble, his work lived; there is some pulse in the least productions of this age; force and creative fire signalise it; they penetrate through bombast and affectation. Lyly himself, so fantastic that he seems to write purposely in defiance of common sense, is at times a

genuine poet ; a singer, a man capable of rapture, akin to Spenser and Shakspeare ; one of those introspective dreamers, who see dancing fairies, the purpled cheeks of goddesses, drunken, amorous woods, as he says :

“ Adorned with the presence of my love,  
The woods I fear such secret power shall prove,  
As they'll shut up each path, hide every way,  
Because they still would have her go astray.”<sup>1</sup>

The reader must assist me, and assist himself. I cannot otherwise give him to understand what the men of this age had the felicity to experience.

Luxuriance and irregularity were the two features of this spirit and this literature,—features common to all the literatures of the Renaissance, but more marked here than elsewhere, because the German race is not confined, like the Latin, by the taste for harmonious forms, and prefers strong impression to fine expression. We must select amidst this crowd of poets ; and here is one amongst the first, who exhibits, by his writings as well as by his life, the greatness and the folly of the prevailing manners and the public taste : Sir Philip Sidney, nephew of the Earl of Leicester, a great lord and a man of action, accomplished in every kind of culture ; who, after a good training in classical literature, travelled in France, Germany, and Italy ; read Plato and Aristotle, studied astronomy and geometry at Venice ; pondered over the Greek tragedies, the Italian sonnets, the pastorals of Montemayor, the poems of Ronsard ; displaying an interest in science, keeping up an exchange of letters with the learned Hubert Languet ; and withal a man of the world, a favourite of Elizabeth, having had enacted in her honour a flattering and comic pastoral ; a genuine “ jewel of the court ;” a judge, like

<sup>1</sup> *The Maid her Metamorphosis.*

d'Urfé, of lofty gallantry and fine language; above all, chivalrous in heart and deed, who wished to follow maritime adventure with Drake, and, to crown all, fated to die an early and heroic death. He was a cavalry officer, and had saved the English army at Gravelines. Shortly after, mortally wounded, and dying of thirst, as some water was brought to him, he saw by his side a soldier still more desperately hurt, who was looking at the water with anguish in his face: "Give it to this man," said he; "his necessity is still greater than mine." Do not forget the vehemence and impetuosity of the middle-age;—one hand ready for action, and kept incessantly on the hilt of the sword or poniard. "Mr. Molineux," wrote he to his father's secretary, "if ever I know you to do so much as read any letter I write to my father, without his commandment or my consent, I will thrust my dagger into you. And trust to it, for I speak it in earnest." It was the same man who said to his uncle's adversaries that they "lied in their throat;" and to support his words, promised them a meeting in three months in any place in Europe. The savage energy of the preceding age remains intact, and it is for this reason that poetry took so firm a hold on these virgin souls. The human harvest is never so fine as when cultivation opens up a new soil. Impassioned, moreover, melancholy and solitary, he naturally turned to noble and ardent fantasy; and he was so much the poet, that he had no need of verse.

Shall I describe his pastoral epic, the *Arcadia*? It is but a recreation, a sort of poetical romance, written in the country for the amusement of his sister; a work of fashion, which, like *Cyrus* and *Clélie*,<sup>1</sup> is not a monu-

<sup>1</sup> Two French novels of the age of Louis XIV., each in ten volumes, and written by Mademoiselle de Scudéry.—Tr.

ment, but a document. This kind of books shows only the externals, the current elegance and politeness, the jargon of the fashionable world,—in short, that which should be spoken before ladies; and yet we perceive from it the bent of the public opinion. In *Cicilie*, oratorical development, delicate and collected analysis, the flowing converse of men seated quietly in elegant arm-chairs; in the *Arcadia*, fantastic imagination, excessive sentiment, a medley of events which suited men scarcely recovered from barbarism. Indeed, in London they still used to fire pistols at each other in the streets; and under Henry VIII. and his children, Queens, a Protector, the highest nobles, knelt under the axe of the executioner. Armed and perilous existence long resisted in Europe the establishment of peaceful and quiet life. It was necessary to change society and the soil, in order to transform men of the sword into citizens. The high roads of Louis XIV. and his regular administration, and more recently the railroads and the *sergents de ville*, freed the French from habits of violence and a taste for dangerous adventure. Remember that at this period men's heads were full of tragical images. Sidney's *Arcadia* contains enough of them to supply half-a-dozen epics. "It is a trifle," says the author; "my young head must be delivered." In the first twenty-five pages you meet with a shipwreck, an account of pirates, a half-drowned prince rescued by shepherds, a journey in *Arcadia*, various disguises, the retreat of a king withdrawn into solitude with his wife and children, the deliverance of a young imprisoned lord, a war against the Helots, the conclusion of peace, and many other things. Read on, and you will find princesses shut up by a wicked fairy, who beats them, and threatens them with

death if they refuse to marry her son ; a beautiful queen condemned to perish by fire if certain knights do not come to her succour ; a treacherous prince tortured for his wicked deeds, then cast from the top of a pyramid ; fights, surprises, abductions, travels : in short, the whole programme of the most romantic tales. That is the serious element : the agreeable is of a like nature ; the fantastic predominates. Improbable pastoral serves, as in Shakspeare or Lope de Vega, for an intermezzo to improbable tragedy. You are always coming upon dancing shepherds. They are very courteous, good poets, and subtle metaphysicians. Several of them are disguised princes who pay their court to the princesses. They sing continually, and get up allegorical dances ; two bands approach, servants of Reason and Passion ; their hats, ribbons, and dress are described in full. They quarrel in verse, and their retorts, which follow close on one another, over-refined, keep up a tournament of wit. Who cared for what was natural or possible in this age ? There were such festivals at Elizabeth's ' progresses ;' and you have only to look at the engravings of Sadeler, Martin de Vos, and Goltzius, to find this mixture of sensitive beauties and philosophical enigmas. The Countess of Pembroke and her ladies were delighted to picture this profusion of costumes and verses, this play beneath the trees. They had eyes in the sixteenth century, senses which sought satisfaction in poetry—the same satisfaction as in masquerading and painting. Man was not yet a pure reasoner ; abstract truth was not enough for him. Rich stuffs, twisted about and folded ; the sun to shine upon them, a large meadow studded with white daisies ; ladies in brocaded dresses, with bare arms, crowns on their heads, instruments of music

behind the trees,—this is what the reader expects; he cares nothing for contrasts; he will readily accept a drawing-room in the midst of the fields.

What are they going to say there? Here comes out that nervous exaltation, in all its folly, which is characteristic of the spirit of the age; love rises to the thirty-sixth heaven. Musidorus is the brother of Céladon; Pamela is closely related to the severe heroines of *Astrée*,<sup>1</sup> all the Spanish exaggerations abound and all the Spanish falsehoods. For in these works of fashion or of the Court, primitive sentiment never retains its sincerity: wit, the necessity to please, the desire for effect, of speaking better than others, alter it, influence it, heap up embellishments and refinements, so that nothing is left but twaddle. Musidorus wished to give Pamela a kiss. She repels him. He would have died on the spot; but luckily remembers that his mistress commanded him to leave her, and finds himself still able to obey her command. He complains to the trees, weeps in verse: there are dialogues where Echo, repeating the last word, replies; duets in rhyme, balanced stanzas, in which the theory of love is minutely detailed; in short, all the grand airs of ornamental poetry. If they send a letter to their mistress, they speak to it, tell the ink: "Therefore mourne boldly, my inke; for while shee lookes upon you, your blacknesse will shine: cry out boldly my lamentation; for while shee reades you, your cries will be musicke."<sup>2</sup>

Again, two young princesses are going to bed: "They impoverished their clothes to enrich their bed,

<sup>1</sup> *Céladon*, a rustic lover in *Astrée*, a French novel in five volumes, named after the heroine, and written by d'Urfé (d. 1625).—Tr.

<sup>2</sup> *Arcadia*, ed. fol. 1629, p. 117.

which for that night might well scorne the shrine of Venus; and there cherishing one another with deare, though chaste embracements; with sweete, though cold kisses; it might seeme that love was come to play him there without dart, or that wearie of his owne fires, he was there to refresh himselfe between their sweete breathing lippes."<sup>1</sup>

In excuse of these follies, remember that they have their parallels in Shakspeare. Try rather to comprehend them, to imagine them in their place, with their surroundings, such as they are; that is, as the excess of singularity and inventive fire. Even though they mar now and then the finest ideas, yet a natural freshness pierces through the disguise. Take another example: "In the time that the morning did strew roses and violets in the heavenly floore against the coming of the sun, the nightingales (striving one with the other which could in most dainty varietie recount their wrong-caused sorrow) made them put off their sleep."

In Sidney's second work, *The Defence of Poesie*, we meet with genuine imagination, a sincere and serious tone, a grand, commanding style, all the passion and elevation which he carries in his heart and puts into his verse. He is a muser, a Platonist, who is penetrated by the doctrines of the ancients, who takes things from a lofty point of view, who places the excellence of poetry not in pleasing effect, imitation, or rhyme, but in that creative and superior conception by which the artist creates anew and embellishes nature. At the same time, he is an ardent man, trusting in the nobleness of his aspirations and in the width of his ideas, who puts down the brawling of the shoppy, narrow, vulgar Puritanism,

<sup>1</sup> *Arcadia*, ed. fol. 1629, book ii. p. 114.



and glows with the lofty irony, the proud freedom, of a poet and a lord.

In his eyes, if there is any art or science capable of augmenting and cultivating our generosity, it is poetry. He draws comparison after comparison between it and philosophy or history, whose pretensions he laughs at and dismisses.<sup>1</sup> He fights for poetry as a knight for his lady, and in what heroic and splendid style! He says: "I never heard the old Song of Percie and Douglas, that I found not my heart moved more than with a trumpet: and yet it is sung but by some blinde Crowder, with no rougher voyce, than rude stile; which beeing so evill apparellled in the dust and Cobweb of that uncivill age, what would it work, trimmed in the gorgeous eloquence of Pindare?"<sup>2</sup>

The philosopher repels, the poet attracts: "Nay hee doth as if your journey should lye through a faire vineyard, at the very first, give you a cluster of grapes, that full of that taste, you may long to passe further."<sup>3</sup>

What description of poetry can displease you? Not pastoral so easy and genial? "Is it the bitter but wholesome Iambicke, who rubbes the galled minde, making shame the Trumpet of villanie, with bold and open crying out against naughtinesse?"<sup>4</sup>

At the close he reviews his arguments, and the vibrating martial accent of his poetical period is like a trump of victory: "So that since the excellencies of it (poetry) may bee so easily and so justly confirmed, and

<sup>1</sup> *The Defence of Poesie*, ed. fol. 1629, p. 558: "I dare undertake, that Orlando Furioso, or honest King Arthur, will never displease a soldier: but the quidditie of *Ens* and *prima materia*, will hardly agree with a Corselet." See also, in the same book, the very lively and spirited personification of History and Philosophy, full of genuine talent.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 553.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 550.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 552.

the low-creeping objections so soone trodden downe, it not being an Art of lyes, but of true doctrine; not of effeminatenesse, but of notable stirring of courage; not of abusing man's wit, but of strengthning man's wit; not banished, but honoured by Plato; let us rather plant more Laurels for to ingarland the Poets heads than suffer the ill-savoured breath of such wrong speakers, once to blow upon the cleare springs of Poesie."<sup>1</sup>

From such vehemence and gravity you may anticipate what his verses will be.

Often, after reading the poets of this age, I have looked for some time at the contemporary prints, telling myself that man, in mind and body, was not then such as we see him to-day. We also have our passions, but we are no longer strong enough to bear them. They unsettle us; we are no longer poets without suffering for it. Alfred de Musset, Heine, Edgar Poe, Burns, Byron, Shelley, Cowper, how many shall I instance? Disgust, mental and bodily degradation, disease, impotence, madness, suicide, at best a permanent hallucination or feverish raving,—these are nowadays the ordinary issues of the poetic temperament. The passion of the brain gnaws our vitals, dries up the blood, eats into the marrow, shakes us like a tempest, and the human frame, such as civilisation has made us, is not substantial enough long to resist it. They, who have been more roughly trained, who are more inured to the inclemencies of climate, more hardened by bodily exercise, more firm against danger, endure and live. Is

<sup>1</sup> *The Defence of Poesie*, p. 560. Here and there we find also verse as spirited as this:

"Or Pindar's Apes, flaunt they in phrases fine,  
Enam'ling with pied flowers their thoughts of gold."—l'. 568.

there a man living who could withstand the storm of passions and visions which swept over Shakspeare, and end, like him, as a sensible citizen and landed proprietor in his small county? The muscles were firmer, despair less prompt. The rage of concentrated attention, the half hallucinations, the anguish and heaving of the breast, the quivering of the limbs bracing themselves involuntarily and blindly for action, all the painful yearnings which accompany grand desires, exhausted them less; this is why they desired longer, and dared more. D'Aubigné, wounded with many sword-thrusts, conceiving death at hand, had himself bound on his horse that he might see his mistress once more, and rode thus several leagues, losing blood all the way, and arriving in a swoon. Such feelings we glean still from their portraits, in the straight looks which pierce like a sword; in that strength of back, bent or twisted; in the sensuality, energy, enthusiasm, which breathe from their attitude or look. Such feelings we still discover in their poetry, in Greene, Lodge, Jonson, Spenser, Shakspeare, in Sidney, as in all the rest. We quickly forget the faults of taste which accompany them, the affectation, the uncouth jargon. Is it really so uncouth? Imagine a man who with closed eyes distinctly sees the adored countenance of his mistress, who keeps it before him all the day; who is troubled and shaken as he imagines ever and anon her brow, her lips, her eyes; who cannot and will not be separated from his vision; who sinks daily deeper in this passionate contemplation; who is every instant crushed by mortal anxieties, or transported by the raptures of bliss: he will lose the exact conception of objects. A fixed idea becomes a false idea. By dint of regarding an object under all its forms, turning it

over, piercing through it, we at last deform it. When we cannot think of a thing without being dazed and without tears, we magnify it, and give it a character which it has not. Hence strange comparisons, over-refined ideas, excessive images, become natural. However far Sidney goes, whatever object he touches, he sees throughout the universe only the name and features of Stella. All ideas bring him back to her. He is drawn ever and invincibly by the same thought: and comparisons which seem far-fetched, only express the unfailing presence and sovereign power of the besetting image. Stella is ill; it seems to Sidney that "Joy, which is inseparate from those eyes, Stella, now learns (strange case) to weepe in thee."<sup>1</sup> To us, the expression is absurd. Is it so for Sidney, who for hours together had dwelt on the expression of those eyes, seeing in them at last all the beauties of heaven and earth, who, compared to them, finds all light dull and all happiness stale? Consider that in every extreme passion ordinary laws are reversed, that our logic cannot pass judgment on it, that we find in it affectation, childishness, witticisms, crudity, folly, and that to us violent conditions of the nervous machine are like an unknown and marvellous land, where common sense and good language cannot penetrate. On the return of spring, when May spreads over the fields her dappled dress of new flowers, Astrophel and Stella sit in the shade of a retired grove, in the warm air, full of birds' voices and pleasant exhalations. Heaven smiles, the wind kisses the trembling leaves, the inclining trees interlace their sappy branches, amorous earth swallows greedily the rippling water:

<sup>1</sup> *Astrophel and Stella*, ed. fol. 1629, 101st sonnet, p. 612.

" In a grove most rich of shade,  
Where birds wanton musicke made,  
May, then yong, his py'd weeds showing,  
New parfum'd with flowers fresh growing,

" Astrophel with Stella sweet,  
Did for mutuall comfort meet,  
Both within themselves oppressed,  
But each in the other blessed. . . .

" Their eares hungry of each word,  
Which the deere tongue would afford,  
But their tongues restrain'd from walking,  
Till their hearts had ended talking.

" But when their tongues could not speake,  
Love it selfe did silence breake ;  
Love did set his lips asunder,  
Thus to speake in love and wonder. . . .

" This small winde which so sweet is,  
See how it the leaves doth kisse,  
Each tree in his best attyring,  
Sense of love to love inspiring."<sup>1</sup>

On his knees, with beating heart, oppressed, it seems to  
him that his mistress becomes transformed ;

" Stella, soveraigne of my joy, . . .  
Stella, starre of heavenly fire,  
Stella, load-starre of desire,  
Stella, in whose shining eyes  
Are the lights of Cupid's skies . . .  
Stella, whose voice when it speakes  
Senses all asunder breakes ;  
Stella, whose voice when it singeth,  
Angels to acquaintance bringeth."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Astrophel and Stella* (1629), 8th song, p. 603.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 604.

These cries of adoration are like a hymn. Every day he writes thoughts of love which agitate him, and in this long journal of a hundred pages we feel the heated breath swell each moment. A smile from his mistress, a curl lifted by the wind, a gesture,—all are events. He paints her in every attitude; he cannot see her too constantly. He talks to the birds, plants, winds, all nature. He brings the whole world to Stella's feet. At the notion of a kiss he swoons :

“Thinke of that most gratefull time  
When thy leaping heart will climbe,  
In my lips to have his biding.  
There those roses for to kisse,  
Which doe breath a sugred blisse,  
Opening rubies, pearles dividing.”<sup>1</sup>

“O joy, too high for my low stile to show :  
O blisse, fit for a nobler state then me :  
Envie, put out thine eyes, lest thou do see  
What Oceans of delight in me do flow.  
My friend, that oft saw through all maskes my wo,  
Come, come, and let me powre my selfe on thee ;  
Gone is the winter of my miserie,  
My spring appeares, O see what here doth grow,  
For Stella hath with words where faith doth shine,  
Of her high heart giv'n me the monarchie :  
I, I, O I may say that she is mine.”<sup>2</sup>

There are Oriental splendours in the dazzling sonnet in which he asks why Stella's cheeks have grown pale :

“Where be those Roses gone, which sweetned so our eyes ?  
Where those red cheekes, which oft with faire encrease doth  
frame

<sup>1</sup> *Astrophel and Stella*, 10th song, p. 610.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* sonnet 69, p. 555.

The height of honour in the kindly badge of shame!  
 Who hath the crimson weeds stolne from my morning skies?<sup>1</sup>

As he says, his "life melts with too much thinking."  
 Exhausted by ecstasy, he pauses; then he flies from  
 thought to thought, seeking relief for his wound, like  
 the Satyr whom he describes:

"Prometheus, when first from heaven hie  
 He brought downe fire, ere then on earth not seeme,  
 Fond of delight, a Satyr standing by  
 Gave it a kisse, as it like sweet had beene.

"Feeling forthwith the other burning power,  
 Wood with the smart with showts and shryking shrill,  
 He sought his ease in river, field, and bower,  
 But for the time his grieve went with him still."<sup>2</sup>

At last calm returned; and whilst this calm lasts, the  
 lively, glowing spirit plays like a flickering flame on the  
 surface of the deep brooding fire. His love-songs and  
 word-portraits, delightful pagan and chivalric fancies,  
 seem to be inspired by Petrarch or Plato. We feel the  
 charm and sportiveness under the seeming affectation:

"Faire eyes, sweete lips, deare heart, that foolish I  
 Could hope by Cupids helpe on you to pray;  
 Since to himselfe he doth your gifts apply,  
 As his maine force, choise sport, and easefull stray.

"For when he will see who dare him gainsay,  
 Then with those eyes he lookes, lo by and by  
 Each soule doth at Loves feet his weapons lay,  
 Glad if for her he give them leave to die.

<sup>1</sup> *Astrophel and Stella*, sonnet 102, p. 614.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 525: this sonnet is headed E. D. Wood, in his *Athen.*  
*Oxon.* i., says it was written by Sir Edward Dyer, Chancellor of the  
 Most noble Order of the Garter.—Ta.

"When he will play, then in her lips he is,  
 Where blushing red, that Loves selfe them doth love,  
 With either lip he doth the other kisse :  
 But when he will for quiete sake remove  
 From all the world, her heart is then his rome,  
 Where well he knowes, no man to him can come."<sup>1</sup>

Both heart and sense are captive here. If he finds the eyes of Stella more beautiful than anything in the world, he finds her soul more lovely than her body. He is a Platonist when he recounts how Virtue, wishing to be loved of men, took Stella's form to enchant their eyes, and make them see the heaven which the inner sense reveals to heroic souls. We recognise in him that entire submission of heart, love turned into a religion, perfect passion which asks only to grow, and which, like the piety of the mystics, finds itself always too insignificant when it compares itself with the object loved :

"My youth doth waste, my knowledge brings forth toys,  
 My wit doth strive those passions to defend,  
 Which for reward spoyle it with vaine annoyas,  
 I see my course to lose my selfe doth bend :  
 I see and yet no greater sorrow take,  
 Than that I lose no more for Stella's sake."<sup>2</sup>

At last, like Socrates in the banquet, he turns his eyes to deathless beauty, heavenly brightness :

"Leave me, O Love, which reachest but to dust,  
 And thou my minde aspire to higher things :  
 Grow rich in that which never taketh rust :  
 Whatever fades, but fading pleasure brings. . . .  
 O take fast hold, let that light be thy guide,  
 In this small course which birth drawes out to death."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Astrophel and Stella*, sonnet 43, p. 545.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* sonnet 18, p. 573.

<sup>3</sup> *Last sonnet*, p. 539.



Divine love continues the earthly love; he was imprisoned in this, and frees himself. By this nobility, these lofty aspirations, recognise one of those serious souls of which there are so many in the same climate and race. Spiritual instincts pierce through the dominant paganism, and ere they make Christians, make Platonists.

## V.

Sidney was only a soldier in an army; there is a multitude about him, a multitude of poets. In fifty-two years, without counting the drama, two hundred and thirty-three are enumerated,<sup>1</sup> of whom forty have genius or talent: Breton, Donne, Drayton, Lodge, Greene, the two Fletchers, Beaumont, Spenser, Shakspeare, Ben Jonson, Marlowe, Wither, Warner, Davison, Carew, Suckling, Herrick;—we should grow tired in counting them. There is a crop of them, and so there is at the same time in Catholic and heroic Spain; and as in Spain it was a sign of the times, the mark of a public want, the index to an extraordinary and transient condition of the mind. What is this condition which gives rise to so universal a taste for poetry? What is it breathes life into their books? How happens it, that amongst the least, in spite of pedantries, awkwardnesses, in the rhyming chronicles or descriptive cyclopedias, we meet with brilliant pictures and genuine love-cries? How happens it, that when this generation was exhausted, true poetry ended in England, as true painting in Italy and Flanders? It was because an epoch of the mind came and passed away,—that, namely, of instinctive and

<sup>1</sup> Nathan Drake, *Shakspeare and his Times*, i. Part 2, ch. 2, 3, 4. Among these 233 poets the authors of isolated pieces are not reckoned, but only those who published or collected their works.

creative conception. These men had new senses, and no theories in their heads. Thus, when they took a walk, their emotions were not the same as ours. What is sunrise to an ordinary man? A white smudge on the edge of the sky, between bosses of clouds, amid pieces of land, and bits of road, which he does not see because he has seen them a hundred times. But for them, all things have a soul; I mean that they feel within themselves, indirectly, the uprising and severance of the outlines, the power and contrast of tints, the sad or delicious sentiment, which breathes from this combination and union like a harmony or a cry. How sorrowful is the sun, as he rises in a mist above the sad sea-furrows; what an air of resignation in the old trees rustling in the night rain; what a feverish tumult in the mass of waves, whose dishevelled locks are twisted for ever on the surface of the abyss! But the great torch of heaven, the luminous god, emerges and shines; the tall, soft, pliant herbs, the evergreen meadows, the expanding roof of lofty oaks,—the whole English landscape, continually renewed and illumined by the flooding moisture, diffuses an inexhaustible freshness. These meadows, red and white with flowers, ever moist and ever young, slip off their veil of golden mist, and appear suddenly, timidly, like beautiful virgins. Here is the cuckoo-flower, which springs up before the coming of the swallow; there the hare-bell, blue as the veins of a woman; the marigold, which sets with the sun, and, weeping, rises with him. Drayton, in his *Polyolbion*, sings

“Then from her burnisht gate the goodly glittering East  
Guilds every lofty top, which late the humorous Night  
Bespangled had with pearle, to please the Mornings sight;

On which the mirthfull Quires, with their cleere open throats,  
 Unto the joyfull Morne so straine their warbling notes,  
 That Hills and Valleys ring, and even the ecchoing Ayre  
 Seemes all compos'd of sounds, about them everywhere. . . .  
 Thus sing away the Morne, untill the mounting Sunne,  
 Through thick exhaled fogs, his golden head hath runne,  
 And through the twisted tops of our close Covert creeps,  
 To kiss the gentle Shade, this while that sweetly sleeps."<sup>1</sup>

A step further, and you will find the old gods reappear.  
 They reappear, these living gods—these living gods  
 mingled with things which you cannot help meeting as  
 soon as you meet nature again. Shakspeare, in the  
*Tempest*, sings:

"Ceres, most bounteous lady thy rich leas  
 Of wheat, rye, barley, vetches, oats, and pease;  
 Thy turfy mountains, where live nibbling sheep,  
 And flat meads thatch'd with stover, them to keep;  
 Thy banks with peon'd and lilled brims,  
 Which spongy April at thy heest betrim,  
 To make cold nymphs chaste crowns . . .  
 Hail, many-colour'd messenger (Iris) . . .  
 Who, with thy saffron wings, upon my flowers  
 Diffusest honey-drops, refreshing showers,  
 And with each end of thy blue bow dost crown  
 My bosky acres and my unshrub'd down."<sup>2</sup>

In *Cymbeline* he says:

"They are as gentle as zephyrs, blowing below the violet,  
 Not wagging his sweet head."<sup>3</sup>

Greene writes:

"When Flora, proud in pomp of all her flowers,  
 Sat bright and gay,

<sup>1</sup> M. Drayton's *Polyolbion*, ed. 1622, 13th song, p. 214.

<sup>2</sup> Act iv. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Act iv. 2.

And gloried in the dew of Iris' showers,  
 And did display  
 Her mantle chequered all with gaudy green."<sup>1</sup>

The same author also says :

"How oft have I descending Titan seen,  
 His burning locks couch in the sea-queen's lap;  
 And beauteous Thetis his red body wrap  
 In watery robes, as he her lord had been!"<sup>2</sup>

So Spenser, in his *Faerie Queene*, sings :

"The ioyous day gan early to appeare ;  
 And fayre Aurora from the deawy bed  
 Of aged Tithone gan herselfe to reare  
 With rosy cheekes, for shame as blushing red :  
 Her golden locks, for hast, were loosely shed  
 About her cares, when Una her did marke  
 Clymbe to her charet, all with flowers spred,  
 From heven high to chace the chearelesse darke ;  
 With mery note her lowd salutes the mounting larks."<sup>3</sup>

All the splendour and sweetness of this moist and well-watered land ; all the specialties, the opulence of its dissolving tints, of its variable sky, its luxuriant vegetation, assemble thus about the gods, who gave them their beautiful form.

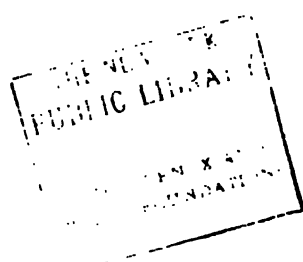
In the life of every man there are moments when, in presence of objects, he experiences a shock. This mass of ideas, of mangled recollections, of mutilated images, which lie hidden in all corners of his mind, are set in motion, organised, suddenly developed like a flower. He is enraptured ; he cannot help looking at and admir-

<sup>1</sup> Greene's Poems, ed. Bell, *Eurymachus in Laudem Mirimida*, p. 78.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* Melicertus' description of his Mistress, p. 38.

<sup>3</sup> Spenser's Works, ed. Todd, 1863, *The Faerie Queene*, l. c. 11, st. 51.

ing the charming creature which has just appeared ; he wishes to see it again, and others like it, and dreams of nothing else. There are such moments in the life of nations, and this is one of them. They are happy in contemplating beautiful things, and wish only that they should be the most beautiful possible. They are not pre-occupied, as we are, with theories. They do not excite themselves to express moral or philosophical ideas. They wish to enjoy through the imagination, through the eyes, like those Italian nobles, who, at the same time, were so captivated by fine colours and forms, that they covered with paintings not only their rooms and their churches, but the lids of their chests and the saddles of their horses. The rich and green sunny country ; young, gaily-attired ladies, blooming with health and love ; half-draped gods and goddesses, masterpieces and models of strength and grace,—these are the most lovely objects which man can contemplate, the most capable of satisfying his senses and his heart—of giving rise to smiles and joy ; and these are the objects which occur in all the poets in a most wonderful abundance of songs, pastorals, sonnets, little fugitive pieces, so lively, delicate, easily unfolded, that we have never since had their equals. What though Venus and Cupid have lost their altars ? Like the contemporary painters of Italy, they willingly imagine a beautiful naked child, drawn on a chariot of gold through the limpid air ; or a woman, redolent with youth, standing on the waves, which kiss her snowy feet. Harsh Ben Jonson is ravished with the scene. The disciplined battalion of his sturdy verses changes into a band of little graceful strophes, which trip as lightly as Raphael's children. He sees his lady approach, sitting on the chariot of Love, drawn





*BEN JONSON*





by swans and doves. Love leads the car; she passes calm and smiling, and all hearts, charmed by her divine looks, wish no other joy than to see and serve her for ever.

"See the chariot at hand here of Love,  
Wherein my lady rideth !  
Each that draws is a swan or a dove,  
And well the car Love guideth.  
As she goes, all hearts do duty  
Unto her beauty ;  
And, enamoured, do wish, so they might  
But enjoy such a sight,  
That they still were to run by her side,  
Through swords, through seas, whither she would ride.  
Do but look on her eyes, they do light  
All that Love's world compriseth !  
Do but look on her hair, it is bright  
As Love's star when it riseth ! . . .  
Have you seen but a bright lily grow,  
Before rude hands have touched it ?  
Have you marked but the fall o' the snow,  
Before the soil hath smutched it ?  
Have you felt the wool of beaver ?  
Or swan's down ever ?  
Or have smelt o' the bud o' the brier ?  
Or the nard in the fire ?  
Or have tasted the bag of the bee ?  
O so white ! O so soft ! O so sweet is she !"<sup>1</sup>

What can be more lively, more unlike measured and artificial mythology ? Like Theocritus and Moschus, they play with their smiling gods, and their belief becomes a festival. One day, in an alcove of a wood, Cupid meets a nymph asleep :

<sup>1</sup> Ben Jonson's *Poems*, ed. R. Bell. *Celebration of Charis ; her Triumph*, p. 125.

“Her golden hair o’erspread her face,  
 Her careless arms abroad were cast,  
 Her quiver had her pillow’s placed,  
 Her breast lay bare to every blast.”<sup>1</sup>

He approaches softly, steals her arrows, and puts his own in their place. She hears a noise at last, raises her reclining head, and sees a shepherd approaching. She flees; he pursues. She bends her bow, and shoots her arrows at him. He only becomes more ardent, and is on the point of seizing her. In despair, she takes an arrow, and buries it in her lovely body. Lo! she is changed, she stops, smiles, loves, draws near him.

“Though mountains meet not, lovers may.  
 What other lovers do, did they.  
 The god of Love sat on a tree,  
 And laught that pleasant sight to see.”<sup>2</sup>

A drop of archness falls into the medley of artlessness and voluptuous charm; it was so in Longus, and in all that delicious nosegay called the *Anthology*. Not the dry mocking of Voltaire, of folks who possessed only wit, and always lived in a drawing-room; but the raillery of artists, lovers whose brain is full of colour and form, who, when they recount a bit of roguishness, imagine a stooping neck, lowered eyes, the blushing of vermillion cheeks. One of these fair ones says the following verses, simpering, and we can even see now the pouting of her lips:

“Love in my bosom like a bee  
 Doth suck his sweet.  
 Now with his wings he plays with me,  
 Now with his feet.

<sup>1</sup> *Cupid’s Pastime*, unknown author, ab. 1621.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

Within my eyes he makes his rest,  
His bed amid my tender breast,  
My kisses are his daily feast.  
And yet he robs me of my rest.  
Ah ! wanton, will ye !"<sup>1</sup>

What relieves these sportive pieces is their splendour of imagination. There are effects and flashes which we hardly dare quote, dazzling and maddening, as in the *Song of Songs* :

" Her eyes, fair eyes, like to the purest lights  
That animate the sun, or cheer the day ;  
In whom the shining sunbeams brightly play,  
Whiles fancy doth on them divine delights.

" Her cheeks like ripened lilies steeped in wine,  
Or fair pomegranate kernels washed in milk,  
Or snow-white threads in nets of crimson silk,  
Or gorgeous clouds upon the sun's decline.

" Her lips are roses over-washed with dew,  
Or like the purple of Narcissus' flower . . .

" Her crystal chin like to the purest mould,  
Enchased with dainty daisies soft and white,  
Where fancy's fair pavilion once is pight,  
Whereas embraced his beauties he doth hold.

" Her neck like to an ivory shining tower,  
Where through with azure veins sweet nectar runs,  
Or like the down of swans where Senesee woons,  
Or like delight that doth itself devour.

" Her paps are like fair apples in the prime,  
As round as orient pearls, as soft as down ;  
They never veil their fair through winter's frown,  
But from their sweets love sucked his summer time."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Rosalind's Madrigal*.

<sup>2</sup> Greene's *Poems*, ed. R. Bell, *Menaphon's Eclogue*, p. 41.

"What need compare, where sweet exceeds compare?  
Who draws his thoughts of love from senseless things,  
Their pomp and greatest glories doth impair,  
And mounts love's heaven with overladen wings."<sup>1</sup>

I can well believe that things had no more beauty then than now; but I am sure that men found them more beautiful.

When the power of embellishment is so great, it is natural that they should paint the sentiment which unites all joys, whither all dreams converge,—ideal love, and in particular, artless and happy love. Of all sentiments, there is none for which we have more sympathy. It is of all the most simple and sweet. It is the first motion of the heart, and the first word of nature. It is made up of innocence and self-abandonment. It is clear of reflection and effort. It extricates us from complicated passion, contempt, regret, hate, violent desires. It penetrates us, and we breathe it as the fresh breath of the morning wind, which has swept over flowery meads. The knights of this perilous court inhaled it, and were enraptured, and so rested in the contrast from their actions and their dangers. The most severe and tragic of their poets turned aside to meet it, Shakspeare among the evergreen oaks of the forest of Arden,<sup>2</sup> Ben Jonson in the woods of Sherwood,<sup>3</sup> amid the wide shady glades, the shining leaves and moist flowers, trembling on the margin of lonely springs. Marlowe himself, the terrible painter of the agony of Edward II., the impressive and powerful poet, who wrote *Faustus*, *Tamerlane*, and the *Jew of*

<sup>1</sup> Greene's *Poems*, *Melicertus' Eclogue*, p. 43.      <sup>2</sup> *As you Like it*.

<sup>3</sup> *The Sad Shepherd*. See also Beaumont and Fletcher, *The Faithful Shepherdess*.

*Malta*, leaves his sanguinary dramas, his high-sounding verse, his images of fury, and nothing can be more musical and sweet than his song. A shepherd, to gain his lady-love, says to her :

“Come live with me and be my Love,  
And we will all the pleasures prove  
That hills and valleys, dale and field,  
And all the craggy mountains yield.  
There we will sit upon the rocks,  
And see the shepherds feed their flocks,  
By shallow rivers, to whose falls  
Melodious birds sing madrigals.  
There will I make thee beds of roses  
And a thousand fragrant posies,  
A cap of flowers, and a kirtle  
Embroider'd all with leaves of myrtle.  
A gown made of the finest wool,  
Which from our pretty lambs we pull,  
Fair lined slippers for the cold,  
With buckles of the purest gold.  
A belt of straw and ivy buds,  
With coral clasps and amber studs :  
And if these pleasures may thee move,  
Come live with me and be my Love. . . .  
The shepherd swains shall dance and sing  
For thy delight each May-morning :  
If these delights thy mind may move,  
Then live with me and be my Love”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This poem was, and still is, frequently attributed to Shakespeare. It appears as his in Knight's edition, published a few years ago. Isaac Walton, however, writing about fifty years after Marlowe's death, attributes it to him. In Palgrave's *Golden Treasury* it is also ascribed to the same author. As a confirmation, let us state that Ithamore, in Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*, says to the courtesan (Act iv. Sc. 4) :

“Thou in those groves, by Dis above,  
Shalt live with me, and be my love.”—*Tz.*

The unpolished gentlemen of the period, returning from hawking, were more than once arrested by such rustic pictures; such as they were, that is to say, imaginative and not very citizen-like, they had dreamed of figuring in them on their own account. But while entering into, they reconstructed them; they reconstructed them in their parks, prepared for Queen Elizabeth's entrance, with a profusion of costumes and devices, not troubling themselves to copy rough nature exactly. Improbability did not disturb them; they were not minute imitators, students of manners: they created; the country for them was but a setting, and the complete picture came from their fancies and their hearts. Romantic it may have been, even impossible, but it was on this account the more charming. Is there a greater charm than putting on one side this actual world which fetters or oppresses us, to float vaguely and easily in the azure and the light, on the summit of the cloud-capped land of fairies, to arrange things according to the pleasure of the moment, no longer feeling the oppressive laws, the harsh and resisting framework of life, adorning and varying everything after the caprice and the refinements of fancy? That is what is done in these little poems. Usually the events are such as happen nowhere, or happen in the land where kings turn shepherds and marry shepherdesses. The beautiful Argentile<sup>1</sup> is detained at the court of her uncle, who wishes to deprive her of her kingdom, and commands her to marry Curan, a boor in his service; she flees, and Curan in despair goes and lives two years among the shepherds. One day he meets a beautiful country-woman, and loves her;

<sup>1</sup> *Chalmers' English Poets*, William Warner, *Fourth Book of Albion's England*, ch. xx. p. 551.

gradually, while speaking to her, he thinks of Argentile, and weeps; he describes her sweet face, her lithe figure, her blue-veined delicate wrists, and suddenly sees that the peasant girl is weeping. She falls into his arms, and says, "I am Argentile." Now Curan was a king's son, who had disguised himself thus for love of Argentile. He resumes his armour, and defeats the wicked king. There never was a braver knight; and they both reigned long in Northumberland. From a hundred such tales, tales of the spring-time, the reader will perhaps bear with me while I pick out one more, gay and simple as a May morning. The Princess Dowsabel came down one morning into her father's garden; she gathers honeysuckles, primroses, violets, and daisies; then, behind a hedge, she heard a shepherd singing, and that so finely that she loved him at once. He promises to be faithful, and asks for a kiss. Her cheeks became as crimson as a rose:

" With that she bent her snow white knee,  
Down by the shepherd kneeled she,  
And him she sweetly kiss'd.  
With that the shepherd whoop'd for joy;  
Quoth he: 'There's never shepherd's boy  
That ever was so blest.'"<sup>1</sup>

Nothing more; is it not enough? It is but a moment's fancy; but they had such fancies every moment. Think what poetry was likely to spring from them, how superior to common events, how free from literal imitation, how smitten with ideal beauty, how capable of creating a world beyond our sad world. In fact, among all these poems there is one truly divine, so

<sup>1</sup> *Chalmers' English Poets*, M. Drayton's *Fourth Eclogue*, iv. p. 438.



divine that the reasoners of succeeding ages have found it wearisome, that even now but few understand it—Spenser's *Færie Queene*.

One day Monsieur Jourdain, having turned Mamamouchi<sup>1</sup> and learned orthography, sent for the most illustrious writers of the age. He settled himself in his arm-chair, pointed with his finger at several folding-stools for them to sit down, and said :

"I have read your little productions, gentlemen. They have afforded me much pleasure. I wish to give you some work to do. I have given some lately to little Lulli,<sup>2</sup> your fellow-labourer. It was at my command that he introduced the sea-shell at his concerts,—a melodious instrument, which no one thought of before, and which has such a pleasing effect. I insist that you will work out my ideas as he has worked them out, and I give you an order for a poem in prose. What is not prose, you know, is verse ; and what is not verse, is prose. When I say, 'Nicolle, bring me my slippers and give me my nightcap,' I speak prose. Take this sentence as your model. This style is much more pleasing than the jargon of unfinished lines which you call verse. As for the subject, let it be myself. You will describe my flowered dressing-gown which I have put on to receive you in, and this little green velvet undress which I wear underneath, to do my morning exercise in. You will set down that this chintz costs a louis an ell. The description, if well worked out will furnish some very pretty paragraphs, and will enlighten the public as to the cost of things. I desire also that you should speak of my mirrors, my carpets, my hangings. My tradesmen will let you have their bills ; don't fail to put them in. I shall be glad to read in your works, all fully and naturally set forth, about my father's shop, who, like a real gentleman, sold cloth to

<sup>1</sup> Mons. Jourdain is the hero of Molière's comedy, *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, the type of a vulgar and successful upstart ; Mamamouchi is a mock title.—Tr.

<sup>2</sup> Lulli, a celebrated Italian composer of the time of Molière.—Tr.

oblige his friends ; my maid Nicolle's kitchen, the genteel behaviour of Brusquet, the little dog of my neighbour M. Dimanche. You might also explain my domestic affairs : there is nothing more interesting to the public than to hear how a million may be scraped together. Tell them also that my daughter Lucile has not married that little rascal Cléonte, but M. Samuel Bernard, who made his fortune as a *fermier-général*, keeps his carriage and is going to be a minister of state. For this I will pay you liberally, half-a-louis for a yard of writing. Come back in a month, and let me see what my ideas have suggested to you."

We are the descendants of M. Jourdain, and this is how we have been talking to the men of genius from the beginning of the century, and the men of genius have listened to us. Hence arise our shoppy and realistic novels. I pray the reader to forget them, to forget himself, to become for a while a poet, a gentleman, a man of the sixteenth century. Unless we bury the M. Jourdain who survives in us, we shall never understand Spenser.

## VI.

Spenser belonged to an ancient family, allied to great houses ; was a friend of Sidney and Raleigh, the two most accomplished knights of the age—a knight himself, at least in heart ; who had found in his connections, his friendships, his studies, his life, everything calculated to lead him to ideal poetry. We find him at Cambridge, where he imbues himself with the noblest ancient philosophies ; in a northern country, where he passes through a deep and unfortunate passion ; at Penshurst, in the castle and in the society where the *Arcadia* was produced ; with Sidney, in whom survived entire the romantic poetry and heroic generosity of the

feudal spirit; at court, where all the splendours of a disciplined and gorgeous chivalry were gathered about the throne; finally, at Kilcolman, on the borders of a beautiful lake, in a lonely castle, from which the view embraced an amphitheatre of mountains, and the half of Ireland. Poor on the other hand,<sup>1</sup> not fit for court, and though favoured by the queen, unable to obtain from his patrons anything but inferior employment; in the end, wearied of solicitations, and banished to his dangerous property in Ireland, whence a rebellion expelled him, after his house and child had been burned; he died three months later, of misery and a broken heart.<sup>2</sup> Expectations and rebuffs, many sorrows and many dreams, some few joys, and a sudden and frightful calamity, a small fortune and a premature end; this indeed was a poet's life. But the heart within was the true poet—from it all proceeded; circumstances furnished the subject only; he transformed them more than they him; he received less than he gave. Philosophy and landscapes, ceremonies and ornaments, splendours of the country and the court, on all which he painted or thought, he impressed his inward nobleness. Above all, his was a soul captivated by sublime and chaste beauty, eminently platonic; one of these lofty and refined souls most charming of all, who, born in the lap of nature, draw thence their sustenance, but soar higher, enter the regions of mysticism, and mount instinctively in order to expand on the confines of a loftier world. Spenser leads us to Milton,

<sup>1</sup> It is very doubtful whether Spenser was so poor as he is generally believed to have been.—TR

<sup>2</sup> "He died for want of bread, in King Street." Ben Jonson, quoted by Drummond.

and thence to Puritanism, as Plato to Virgil, and thence to Christianity. Sensuous beauty is perfect in both, but their main worship is for moral beauty. He appeals to the Muses :

“Revele to me the sacred nourserie  
Of vertue, which with you doth there remaine,  
Where it in silver bowre does hidden ly  
From view of men and wicked worlds disdaine !”

He encourages his knight when he sees him droop. He is wroth when he sees him attacked. He rejoices in his justice, temperance, courtesy. He introduces in the beginning of a song, long stanzas in honour of friendship and justice. He pauses, after relating a lovely instance of chastity, to exhort women to modesty. He pours out the wealth of his respect and tenderness at the feet of his heroines. If any coarse man insults them, he calls to their aid nature and the gods. Never does he bring them on his stage without adorning their name with splendid eulogy. He has an adoration for beauty worthy of Dante and Plotinus. And this, because he never considers it a mere harmony of colour and form, but an emanation of unique, heavenly, imperishable beauty, which no mortal eye can see, and which is the masterpiece of the great Author of the worlds.<sup>1</sup> Bodies only render it visible ; it does not live in them ; charm and attraction are not in things, but in the immortal idea which shines through them :

“For that same goodly hew of white and red,  
With which the cheekes are sprinkled, shall decay,  
And those sweete rosy leaves, so fairly spread  
Upon the lips, shall fade and fall away  
To that they were, even to corrupted clay :

<sup>1</sup> *Hymns of Love and Beauty ; of heavenly Love and Beauty.*

That golden wyre, those sparckling stars so bright,  
 Shall turne to dust, and lose their goodly light.  
 But that faire lampe, from whose celestially ray  
 That light proceedes, which kindleth lovers fire,  
 Shall never be extinguiht nor decay ;  
 But, when the vitall spirits doe expyre,  
 Upon her native planet shall retyre ;  
 For it is heavenly borne, and cannot die,  
 Being a parcell of the purest skie." <sup>1</sup>

In presence of this ideal of beauty, love is transformed :

" For Love is lord of Truth and Loialtie,  
 Lifting himself out of the lowly dust,  
 On golden plumes up to the purest skie,  
 Above the reach of loathly sinfull lust,  
 Whose base affect through cowardly distrust  
 Of his weake wings dare not to heaven fly,  
 But like a moldwarpe in the earth doth ly." <sup>2</sup>

Love such as this contains all that is good, and fine, and noble. It is the prime source of life, and the eternal soul of things. It is this love which, pacifying the primitive discord, has created the harmony of the spheres, and maintains this glorious universe. It dwells in God, and is God Himself, come down in bodily form to regenerate the tottering world and save the human race ; around and within animated beings, when our eyes can pierce outward appearances, we behold it as a living light, penetrating and embracing every creature. We touch here the sublime sharp summit where the world of mind and the world of sense unite ; where man, gathering with both hands the loveliest flowers of either, feels himself at the same time a pagan and a Christian.

<sup>1</sup> *A Hymne in Honour of Beautie*, l. 92-105.

<sup>2</sup> *A Hymne in Honour of Love*, l. 176-182.

So much, as a testimony to his heart. But he was also a poet, that is, pre-eminently a creator and a dreamer, and that most naturally, instinctively, unceasingly. We might go on for ever describing this inward condition of all great artists; there would still remain much to be described. It is a sort of mental growth with them; at every instant a bud shoots forth, and on this another and still another; each producing, increasing, blooming of itself, so that after a few moments we find first a green plant crop up, then a thicket, then a forest. A character appears to them, then an action, then a landscape, then a succession of actions, characters, landscapes, producing, completing, arranging themselves by instinctive development, as when in a dream we behold a train of figures which, without any outward compulsion, display and group themselves before our eyes. This fount of living and changing forms is inexhaustible in Spenser; he is always imaging; it is his specialty. He has but to close his eyes, and apparitions arise; they abound in him, crowd, overflow; in vain he pours them forth; they continually float up, more copious and more dense. Many times, following the inexhaustible stream, I have thought of the vapours which rise incessantly from the sea, ascend, sparkle, commingle their golden and snowy scrolls, while underneath them new mists arise, and others again beneath, and the splendid procession never grows dim or ceases.

But what distinguishes him from all others is the mode of his imagination. Generally with a poet his mind ferments vehemently and by fits and starts; his ideas gather, jostle each other, suddenly appear in masses and heaps, and burst forth in sharp, piercing, concentrative words; it seems that they need these

sudden accumulations to imitate the unity and life-like energy of the objects which they reproduce; at least almost all the poets of that time, Shakspeare at their head, act thus. Spenser remains calm in the fervour of invention. The visions which would be fever to another, leave him at peace. They come and unfold themselves before him, easily, entire, uninterrupted, without starts. He is epic, that is, a narrator, not a singer like an ode-writer, nor a mimic like a play-writer. No modern is more like Homer. Like Homer and the great epic-writers, he only presents consecutive and noble, almost classical images, so nearly ideas, that the mind seizes them unaided and unawares. Like Homer, he is always simple and clear: he makes no leaps, he omits no argument, he robs no word of its primitive and ordinary meaning, he preserves the natural sequence of ideas. Like Homer again, he is redundant, ingenuous, even childish. He says everything, he puts down reflections which we have made beforehand; he repeats without limit his grand ornamental epithets. We can see that he beholds objects in a beautiful uniform light, with infinite detail; that he wishes to show all this detail, never fearing to see his happy dream change or disappear; that he traces its outline with a regular movement, never hurrying or slackening. He is even a little prolix, too unmindful of the public, too ready to lose himself and dream about the things he beholds. His thought expands in vast repeated comparisons, like those of the old Ionic poet. If a wounded giant falls, he finds him

"As an aged tree,  
High growing on the top of rocky clift,  
Whose hart-strings with keene steele nigh hewen be,

The mightie trunck halfe rent with ragged rift,  
Doth roll adowne the rocks, and fall with fearefull drift.

Or as a castle, reared high and round,  
By subtile engins and malicious slight  
Is undermined from the lowest ground,  
And her foundation forst, and feebled quight,  
At last downe falles ; and with her heaped hight  
Her hastie ruine does more heaue make,  
And yields it selfe unto the victours might :  
Such was this Gyaunt's fall, that seemd to shake  
The stedfast globe of earth, as it for feare did quake."<sup>1</sup>

He develops all the ideas which he handles. All his phrases become periods. Instead of compressing, he expands. To bear this ample thought and its accompanying train, he requires a long stanza, ever renewed, long alternate verses, reiterated rhymes, whose uniformity and fulness recall the majestic sounds which undulate eternally through the woods and the fields. To unfold these epic faculties, and to display them in the sublime region where his soul is naturally borne, he requires an ideal stage, situated beyond the bounds of reality, with personages who could hardly exist, and in a world which could never be.

He made many miscellaneous attempts in sonnets, elegies, pastorals, hymns of love, little sparkling word pictures ;<sup>2</sup> they were but essays, incapable for the most part of supporting his genius. Yet already his magnificent imagination appeared in them ; gods, men, landscapes, the world which he sets in motion is a

<sup>1</sup> *The Faerie Queene*, i. c. 8, st. 22, 23.

<sup>2</sup> *The Shepherd's Calendar*, *Amoretti*, *Sonnets*, *Prothalamion*, *Epithalamion*, *Musiopotmos*, *Virgil's Gnat*, *The Ruines of Time*, *The Teares of the Muses*, etc.



thousand miles from that in which we live. His *Shepherd's Calendar*<sup>1</sup> is a thought-inspiring and tender pastoral, full of delicate loves, noble sorrows, lofty ideas, where no voice is heard but of thinkers and poets. His *Visions of Petrarch and Du Bellay* are admirable dreams, in which palaces, temples of gold, splendid landscapes, sparkling rivers, marvellous birds, appear in close succession as in an Oriental fairy-tale. If he sings a "Prothalamion," he sees two beautiful swans, white as snow, who come softly swimming down amidst the songs of nymphs and vermeil roses, while the transparent water kisses their silken feathers, and murmurs with joy :

" There, in a meadow, by the river's side.  
A flocke of Nymphes I chaunced to espy,  
All lovely daughters of the Flood thereby,  
With goodly greenish locks, all loose untyde,  
As each had bene a bryde ;  
And each one had a little wicker basket,  
Made of fine twigs, entrayled curiously,  
In which they gathered flowers to fill their flasket,  
And with fine fingers cropt full feateously  
The tender stalkes on hye.  
Of every sort, which in that meadow grew,  
They gathered some ; the violet, pallid blew,  
The little dazie, that at evening closes,  
The virgin lillie, and the primrose trew,  
With store of vermeil roses,  
To deck their bridegroomes posies  
Against the brydale-day, which was not long :  
Sweet Themmines ! runne softly, till I end my song.

<sup>1</sup> Published in 1589 ; dedicated to Philip Sidney.

With that I saw two Swannes of goodly hewe  
 Come softly swimming downe along the lee ;  
 Two fairer birds I yet did never see ;  
 The snow, which doth the top of Pindus strew,  
 Did never whiter shew . . .  
 So purely white they were,  
 That even the gentle stream, the which them bare,  
 Seem'd foule to them, and bad his billowes spare  
 To wet their silken feathers, least they might  
 Soyle their fayre plumes with water not so fayre,  
 And marre their beauties bright,  
 That shone as heavens light,  
 Against their brydale day, which was not long :  
 Sweet Themmes ! runne softly, till I end my song ! " <sup>1</sup>

If he bewails the death of Sidney, Sidney becomes a shepherd ; he is slain like Adonis ; around him gather weeping nymphs :

"The gods, which all things see, this same beheld,  
 And, pitying this paire of lovers trew,  
 Transformed them there lying on the field,  
 Into one flowre that is both red and blew :  
 It first growes red, and then to blew doth fade,  
 Like Astrophel, which thereinto was made.

And in the midst thereof a star appears,  
 As fairly formd as any star in skyes :  
 Resembling Stella in her freshest yeares,  
 Forth darting beames of beautie from her eyes ;  
 And all the day it standeth full of deow,  
 Which is the teares, that from her eyes did flow." <sup>2</sup>

His most genuine sentiments become thus fairy-like.  
 Magic is the mould of his mind, and impresses its shape

<sup>1</sup> *Prothalamion*, l. 19-54.

<sup>2</sup> *Astrophel*, l. 181-192.

on all that he imagines or thinks. Involuntarily he robs objects of their ordinary form. If he looks at a landscape, after an instant he sees it quite differently. He carries it, unconsciously, into an enchanted land; the azure heaven sparkles like a canopy of diamonds, meadows are clothed with flowers, a biped population flutters in the balmy air, palaces of jasper shine among the trees, radiant ladies appear on carved balconies above galleries of emerald. This unconscious toil of mind is like the slow crystallisations of nature. A moist twig is cast into the bottom of a mine, and is brought out again a hoop of diamonds.

At last he finds a subject which suits him, the greatest joy permitted to an artist. He removes his epic, from the common ground which, in the hands of Homer and Dante, gave expression to a living creed, and depicted national heroes. He leads us to the summit of fairy-land, soaring above history, on that extreme verge where objects vanish and pure idealism begins: "I have undertaken a work," he says, "to represent all the moral virtues, assigning to every virtue a knight to be the patron and defender of the same; in whose actions and feats of armes and chivalry the operations of that virtue, whereof he is the protector, are to be expressed, and the vices and unruly appetites that oppose themselves against the same, to be beaten downe and overcome."<sup>1</sup> In fact, he gives us an allegory as the foundation of his poem, not that he dreams of becoming a wit, a preacher of moralities, a propounder of riddles. He does not subordinate image to idea; he is a seer, not a philosopher. They are living men and

<sup>1</sup> Words attributed to him by Lodowick Bryakett, *Discourses of Civill Life*, ed. 1606, p. 26.

actions which he sets in motion; only from time to time, in his poem, enchanted palaces, a whole train of splendid visions trembles and divides like a mist, enabling us to catch a glimpse of the thought which raised and arranged it. When in his Garden of Adonis we see the countless forms of all living things arranged in due order, in close compass, awaiting life, we conceive with him the birth of universal love, the ceaseless fertility of the great mother, the mysterious swarm of creatures which rise in succession from her "wide wombe of the world." When we see his Knight of the Cross combating with a horrible woman-serpent in defence of his beloved lady Una, we dimly remember that, if we search beyond these two figures, we shall find behind one, Truth, behind the other, Falsehood. We perceive that his characters are not flesh and blood, and that all these brilliant phantoms are phantoms, and nothing more. We take pleasure in their brilliancy, without believing in their substantiality; we are interested in their doings, without troubling ourselves about their misfortunes. We know that their tears and cries are not real. Our emotion is purified and raised. We do not fall into gross illusion; we have that gentle feeling of knowing ourselves to be dreaming. We, like him, are a thousand leagues from actual life, beyond the pangs of painful pity, unmixed terror, violent and bitter hatred. We entertain only refined sentiments, partly formed, arrested at the very moment they were about to affect us with too sharp a stroke. They slightly touch us, and we find ourselves happy in being extricated from a belief which was beginning to be oppressive.

221.19.11

## VII.

What world could furnish materials to so elevated a fancy? One only, that of chivalry; for none is so far from the actual. Alone and independent in his castle, freed from all the ties which society, family, toil, usually impose on the actions of men, the feudal hero had attempted every kind of adventure, but yet he had done less than he imagined; the boldness of his deeds had been exceeded by the madness of his dreams. For want of useful employment and an accepted rule, his brain had laboured on an unreasoning and impossible track, and the urgency of his wearisomeness had increased beyond measure his craving for excitement. Under this stimulus his poetry had become a world of imagery. Insensibly strange conceptions had grown and multiplied in his brains, one over the other, like ivy woven round a tree, and the original trunk had disappeared beneath their rank growth and their obstruction. The delicate fancies of the old Welsh poetry, the grand ruins of the German epics, the marvellous splendours of the conquered East, all the recollections which four centuries of adventure had scattered among the minds of men, had become gathered into one great dream; and giants, dwarfs, monsters, the whole medley of imaginary creatures, of superhuman exploits and splendid follies, were grouped around a unique conception, exalted and sublime love, like courtiers prostrated at the feet of their king. It was an ample and buoyant subject-matter, from which the great artists of the age, Ariosto, Tasso, Cervantes, Rabelais, had hewn their poems. But they belonged too completely to their own time, to admit of their belonging to one

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which had passed.<sup>1</sup> They created a chivalry afresh, but it was not genuine. The ingenious Ariosto, an ironical epicurean, delights his gaze with it, and grows merry over it, like a man of pleasure, a sceptic who rejoices doubly in his pleasure, because it is sweet, and because it is forbidden. By his side poor Tasso, inspired by a fanatical, revived, factitious Catholicism, amid the tinsel of an old school of poetry, works on the same subject, in sickly fashion, with great effort and scant success. Cervantes, himself a knight, albeit he loves chivalry for its nobleness, perceives its folly, and crushes it to the ground, with heavy blows, in the mishaps of the wayside inns. More coarsely, more openly, Rabelais, a rude commoner, drowns it with a burst of laughter, in his merriment and nastiness. Spenser alone takes it seriously and naturally. He is on the level of so much nobleness, dignity, reverie. He is not yet settled and shut in by that species of exact common sense which was to found and cramp the whole modern civilisation. In his heart he inhabits the poetic and shadowy land from which men were daily drawing further and further away. He is enamoured of it, even to its very language; he revives the old words, the expressions of the middle-age, the style of Chaucer, especially in the *Shepherd's Calendar*. He enters straightway upon the strangest dreams of the old story-tellers, without astonishment, like a man who has still stranger dreams of his own. Enchanted castles, monsters and giants, duels in the woods, wandering ladies, all spring up under his hands, the mediæval fancy with the mediæval generosity;

<sup>1</sup> Ariosto, 1474-1533. Tasso, 1544-1595. Cervantes, 1547-1616. Rabelais, 1483-1553.

and it is just because this world is unreal that it so suits his humour.

Is there in chivalry sufficient to furnish him with matter? That is but one world, and he has another. Beyond the valiant men, the glorified images of moral virtues, he has the gods, finished models of sensible beauty; beyond Christian chivalry he has the pagan Olympus; beyond the idea of heroic will which can only be satisfied by adventures and danger, there exists calm energy, which, by its own impulse, is in harmony with actual existence. For such a poet one ideal is not enough; beside the beauty of effort he places the beauty of happiness; he couples them, not deliberately as a philosopher, nor with the design of a scholar like Goethe, but because they are both lovely; and here and there, amid armour and passages of arms, he distributes satyrs, nymphs, Diana, Venus, like Greek statues amid the turrets and lofty trees of an English park. There is nothing forced in the union; the ideal epic, like a superior heaven, receives and harmonises the two worlds; a beautiful pagan dream carries on a beautiful dream of chivalry; the link consists in the fact that they are both beautiful. At this elevation the poet has ceased to observe the differences of races and civilisations. He can introduce into his picture whatever he will; his only reason is, "That suited;" and there could be no better. Under the glossy-leaved oaks, by the old trunk so deeply rooted in the ground, he can see two knights cleaving each other, and the next instant a company of Fauns who came there to dance. The beams of light which have poured down upon the velvet moss, the green turf of an English forest, can reveal the dishevelled locks and white shoulders of

nymphs. Do we not see it in Rubens? And what signify discrepancies in the happy and sublime illusion of fancy? Are there more discrepancies? Who perceives them, who feels them? Who does not feel, on the contrary, that to speak the truth, there is but one world, that of Plato and the poets; that actual phenomena are but outlines—mutilated, incomplete and blurred outlines—wretched abortions scattered here and there on Time's track, like fragments of clay, half moulded, then cast aside, lying in an artist's studio; that, after all, invisible forces and ideas, which for ever renew the actual existences, attain their fulfilment only in imaginary existences; and that the poet, in order to express nature in its entirety, is obliged to embrace in his sympathy all the ideal forms by which nature reveals itself? This is the greatness of his work; he has succeeded in seizing beauty in its fulness, because he cared for nothing but beauty.

The reader will feel that it is impossible to give in full the plot of such a poem. In fact, there are six poems, each of a dozen cantos, in which the action is ever diverging and converging again, becoming confused and starting again; and all the imaginings of antiquity and of the middle-age are, I believe, combined in it. The knight "pricks along the plaine," among the trees, and at a crossing of the paths meets other knights with whom he engages in combat; suddenly from within a cave appears a monster, half woman and half serpent, surrounded by a hideous offspring; further on a giant, with three bodies; then a dragon, great as a hill, with sharp talons and vast wings. For three days he fights him, and twice overthrown, he comes to himself only by aid of "a gracious ointment." After that there are savage



tribes to be conquered, castles surrounded by flames to be taken. Meanwhile ladies are wandering in the midst of forests, on white palfreys, exposed to the assaults of miscreants, now guarded by a lion which follows them, now delivered by a band of satyrs who adore them. Magicians work manifold charms; palaces display their festivities; tilt-yards provide endless tournaments; sea-gods, nymphs, fairies, kings, intermingle in these feasts, surprises, dangers.

You will say it is a phantasmagoria. What matter, if we see it? And we do see it, for Spenser does. His sincerity communicates itself to us. He is so much at home in this world, that we end by finding ourselves at home in it too. He shows no appearance of astonishment at astonishing events; he comes upon them so naturally, that he makes them natural; he defeats the miscreants, as if he had done nothing else all his life. Venus, Diana, and the old deities, dwell at his gate and enter his threshold without his taking any heed of them. His serenity becomes ours. We grow credulous and happy by contagion, and to the same extent as he. How could it be otherwise? Is it possible to refuse credence to a man who paints things for us with such accurate details and in such lively colours? Here with a dash of his pen he describes a forest for you; and are you not instantly in it with him? Beech trees with their silvery stems, "loftie trees iclad with sommers pride, did spred so broad, that heavens light did hide;" rays of light tremble on the bark and shine on the ground, on the reddening ferns and low bushes, which, suddenly smitten with the luminous track, glisten and glimmer. Footsteps are scarcely heard on the thick beds of heaped leaves; and at distant intervals, on the tall herbage,

drops of dew are sparkling. Yet the sound of a horn reaches us through the foliage; how sweetly yet cheerfully it falls on the ear, amidst this vast silence! It resounds more loudly; the clatter of a hunt draws near; "eft through the thicke they heard one rudely rush;" a nymph approaches, the most chaste and beautiful in the world. Spenser sees her; nay more, he kneels before her:

" Her face so faire, as flesh it seemed not,  
But heavenly pourtraict of bright angels hew,  
Cleare as the skye, withouten blame or blot,  
Through goodly mixture of complexions dew;  
And in her cheekes the vermeill red did shew  
Like roses in a bed of lillies shed,  
The which ambrosiall odours from them threw,  
And gazers sence with double pleasure fed,  
Hable to heale the sicke and to revive the ded.

In her faire eyes two living lamps did flame,  
Kindled above at th' Heavenly Makers light,  
And darted fyrie beames out of the same;  
So passing persant, and so wondrous bright,  
That quite bereav'd the rash beholders sight:  
In them the blinded god his lustfull fyre  
To kindle oft assayd, but had no might;  
For, with dredd maiestie and awfull yre,  
She broke his wanton darts, and quenched base desyre.

Her yvorie forehead, full of bountie brave,  
Like a broad table did itselfe disprede,  
For Love his loftie triumphes to engrave,  
And write the battailes of his great godhed:  
All good and honour might therein be red;  
For there their dwelling was. And, when she spake,  
Sweete wordes, like dropping honny, she did shed;

And 'twixt the perles and rubins softly brake  
A silver sound, that heavenly musicke seemd to make.

Upon her eyelids many Graces sate,  
Under the shadow of her even browes,  
Working belgardes and amorous retrate ;  
And everie one her with a grace endowes,  
And everie one with meekenesse to her bowes :  
So glorious mirrhour of celestially grace,  
And soveraine monument of mortall vowes,  
How shall frayle pen describe her heavenly face,  
For feare, through want of skill, her beauty to disgrace !

So faire, and thousand thousand times more faire,  
She seemd, when she presented was to sight ;  
And was yclad, for heat of scorching aire,  
All in a silken Camus lilly whight,  
Purfled upon with many a folded plight,  
Which all above besprinkled was throughout  
With golden aygulets, that glistred bright,  
Like twinkling starres ; and all the skirt about  
Was hemd with golden fringe.

Below her ham her weed did somewhat trayne,  
And her streight legs most bravely were embayld  
In gilden buskins of costly cordwayne,  
All bard with golden bendes, which were entayld  
With curious antickes, and full fayre aumayld :  
Before, they fastned were under her knee  
In a rich iewell, and therein entrayld  
The ends of all the knots, that none might see  
How they within their fouldings close enwrapped bee.

Like two faire marble pillours they were seene,  
Which doe the temple of the gods support,  
Whom all the people decks with girlands greene,  
And honour in their festivall resort ;

Those same with stately grace and princely port  
 She taught to tread, when she herselfe would grace;  
 But with the woody nymphes when she did play,  
 Or when the flying libbard she did chace,  
 She could them nimble move, and after fly apace.

And in her hand a sharpe bore-speare she held,  
 And at her backe a bow and quiver gay,  
 Stuft with steel-headed dartes wherewith she queld  
 The salvage beastes in her victorious play,  
 Knit with a golden bauldricke which forelay  
 Athwart her snowy brest, and did divide  
 Her daintie paps; which, like young fruit in May,  
 Now little gan to swell, and being tide  
 Through her thin weed their places only signified.

Her yellow lockes, crisped like golden wyre,  
 About her shoulders weren loosely shed,  
 And, when the winde emongst them did inspyre,  
 They waved like a penon wyde dispred  
 And low behinde her backe were scattered:  
 And, whether art it were or heedlesse hap,  
 As through the flouring forrest rash she fled,  
 In her rude heares sweet flowres themselves did lap,  
 And flourishing fresh leaves and blossomes did enwrap."<sup>1</sup>

"The daintie rose, the daughter of her morne,  
 More deare than life she tendered, whose flowre  
 The girlond of her honour did adorne;  
 Ne suffered she the middayes scorching powre.  
 Ne the sharp northerne wind thereon to showre;  
 But lapped up her silken leaves most chayre,  
 Whensoe the froward skye began to lowre;  
 But, soone as calmed was the cristall ayre,  
 She did it fayre dispred, and let to florissh fayre."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Faerie Queene*, ii. c. 3, st. 22-30.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* iii. c. 5, st. 51.

He is on his knees before her, I repeat, as a child on Corpus Christi day, among flowers and perfumes, transported with admiration, so that he sees a heavenly light in her eyes, and angel's tints on her cheeks, even impressing into her service Christian angels and pagan graces to adorn and wait upon her; it is love which brings such visions before him;

"Sweet love, that doth his golden wings embay  
In blessed nectar and pure pleasures well."

Whence this perfect beauty, this modest and charming dawn, in which he assembles all the brightness, all the sweetness, all the virgin graces of the full morning? What mother begat her, what marvellous birth brought to light such a wonder of grace and purity? One day, in a sparkling, solitary fountain, where the sunbeams shone, Chrysogone was bathing with roses and violets.

"It was upon a sommers shinie day,  
When Titan faire his beamès did display,  
In a fresh fountaine, far from all mens vew,  
She bath'd her brest the boyling heat t' allay;  
She bath'd with roses red and violets blew,  
And all the sweetest flowers that in the forrest grew.  
Till faint through yrkesome wearines adowne  
Upon the grassy ground herselfe she layd  
To sleepe, the whiles a gentle slombring swowne  
Upon her fell all naked bare displayd."<sup>1</sup>

The beams played upon her body, and "fructified" her. The months rolled on. Troubled and ashamed, she went into the "wildernesse," and sat down, "every sence with sorrow sore opprest." Meanwhile Venus,

<sup>1</sup> *The Faerie Queene*, iii. c. 6, st. 6 and 7.

searching for her boy Cupid, who had mutinied and fled from her, "wandered in the world." She had sought him in courts, cities, cottages, promising "kisses sweet, and sweeter things, unto the man that of him tydings to her brings."

"Shortly unto the wastefull woods she came,  
Whereas she found the goddesse (Diana) with her crew,  
After late chace of their embrewed game,  
Sitting beside a fountaine in a rewe ;  
Some of them washing with the liquid dew  
From off their dainty limbes the dusty sweat  
And soyle, which did deforme their lively hew ;  
Others lay shaded from the scorching heat  
The rest upon her person gave attendance great.  
She, having hong upon a bough on high  
Her bow and painted quiver, had unlaste  
Her silver buskins from her nimble thigh,  
And her lanck loynes ungirt, and breasts unbraste,  
After her heat the breathing cold to taste ;  
Her golden lockes, that late in tresses bright  
Embreaded were for hindring of her haste,  
Now loose about her shoulders hong undight,  
And were with sweet Ambrosia all besprinckled light."<sup>1</sup>

Diana, surprised thus, repulses Venus, "and gan to smile, in scorne of her vaine playnt," swearing that if she should catch Cupid, she would clip his wanton wings. Then she took pity on the afflicted goddess, and set herself with her to look for the fugitive. They came to the "shady covert" where Chrysogone, in her sleep, had given birth "unawares" to two lovely girls, "as faire as springing day." Diana took one, and made her the purest of all virgins. Venus carried off the other to the

<sup>1</sup> *The Faerie Queene*, iii. c. 6, st. 17 and 18.

Garden of Adonis, "the first seminary of all things, that are borne to live and dye;" where Psyche, the bride of Love, disports herself; where Pleasure, their daughter, wantons with the Graces; where Adonis, "lapped in flowres and pretious spycery," "liveth in eternal bliss," and came back to life through the breath of immortal Love. She brought her up as her daughter, selected her to be the most faithful of loves, and after long trials, gave her hand to the good knight Sir Scudamore.

That is the kind of thing we meet with in the wondrous forest. Are you ill at ease there, and do you wish to leave it because it is wondrous? At every bend in the alley, at every change of the light, a stanza, a word, reveals a landscape or an apparition. It is morning, the white dawn gleams faintly through the trees; bluish vapours veil the horizon, and vanish in the smiling air; the springs tremble and murmur faintly amongst the mosses, and on high the poplar leaves begin to stir and flutter like the wings of butterflies. A knight alights from his horse, a valiant knight, who has unhorsed many a Saracen, and experienced many an adventure. He unlaces his helmet, and on a sudden you perceive the cheeks of a young girl;

"Which doft, her golden lockes, that were upbound  
Still in a knot, unto her heeles downe traced,  
And like a silken veile in compasse round  
About her backe and all her bodie wound;  
Like as the shining skie in summers night,  
What time the dayes with scorching heat abound,  
Is creasted all with lines of fire light,  
That it prodigious seemes in common peoples sight."<sup>1</sup>

It is Britomart, a virgin and a heroine, like Clorinda.

<sup>1</sup> *The Faerie Queene*, iv. c. 1, st. 12.

or Marfisa,<sup>1</sup> but how much more ideal! The deep sentiment of nature, the sincerity of reverie, the ever-flowing fertility of inspiration, the German seriousness, reanimate in this poem classical or chivalrous conceptions, even when they are the oldest or the most trite. The train of splendours and of scenery never ends. Desolate promontories, cleft with gaping chasms; thunder-stricken and blackened masses of rocks, against which the hoarse breakers dash; palaces sparkling with gold, wherein ladies, beauteous as angels, reclining carelessly on purple cushions, listen with sweet smiles to the harmony of music played by unseen hands; lofty silent walks, where avenues of oaks spread their motionless shadows over clusters of virgin violets, and turf which never mortal foot has trod;—to all these beauties of art and nature he adds the marvels of mythology, and describes them with as much of love and sincerity as a painter of the Renaissance or an ancient poet. Here approach on chariots of shell, Cymoënt and her nymphs:

“A teme of dolphins raunged in aray  
Drew the smooth charett of sad Cymoënt;  
They were all taught by Triton to obey  
To the long raynes at her commaundement:  
As swifte as swallowes on the waves they went,  
That their brode flaggy finnes no fome did reare,  
Ne bubling rowndell they behinde them sent;  
The rest, of other fishes drawen weare;  
Which with their finny oars the swelling sea did sheare.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Clorinda, the heroine of the infidel army in Tasso's epic poem *Jerusalem Delivered*; Marfisa, an Indian Queen, who figures in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, and also in Boyardo's *Orlando Innamorato*.—TR.

<sup>2</sup> *The Faërie Queene*, iii. c. 4, st. 33.



Nothing, again, can be sweeter or calmer than the description of the palace of Morpheus :

“ He, making speedy way through spersed ayre,  
 And through the world of waters wide and deepe,  
 To Morpheus house doth hastily repaire.  
 Amid the bowels of the earth full steepe,  
 And low, where dawning day doth never peepe  
 His dwelling is; there Tethys his wet bed  
 Doth ever wash, and Cynthia still doth steepe  
 In silver deaw his ever-drouping hed,  
 Whiles sad Night over him her mantle black doth spread.  
 And, more to lulle him in his slumber soft,  
 A trickling streame from high rock tumbling downe  
 And ever-drizzling raine upon the loft,  
 Mixt with a murmuring winde, much like the sowne  
 Of swarming bees, did cast him in a swowne.  
 No other noyse, nor peoples troublous cryes,  
 As still are wont t’ annoy the walled towne,  
 Might there be heard : but careless Quiet lyes,  
 Wrapt in eternall silence farre from enimes.”<sup>1</sup>

Observe also in a corner of this forest, a band of satyrs dancing under the green leaves. They come leaping like wanton kids, as gay as birds of joyous spring. The fair Hellenore, whom they have chosen for “ May-lady,” “ daunst lively ” also, laughing, and “ with girlonds all bespredd.” The wood re-echoes the sound of their “ merry pypes.” “ Their horned feet the greene gras wore.” “ All day they daunced with great lustyhedd,” with sudden motions and alluring looks, while about them their flock feed on “ the brouzes ” at their pleasure.<sup>2</sup> In every book we see strange processions pass by, allegorical and picturesque shows, like those

<sup>1</sup> *The Faerie Queene*, i. c. 1, st. 39 and 41.    <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* iii. c. 10, st. 43-45.

which were then displayed at the courts of princes; now a masquerade of Cupid, now of the Rivers, now of the Months, now of the Vices. Imagination was never more prodigal or inventive. Proud *Lucifera* advances in a chariot "adorned all with gold and girlonds gay," beaming like the dawn, surrounded by a crowd of courtiers whom she dazzles with her glory and splendour: "six unequall beasts" draw her along, and each of these is ridden by a Vice. Idleness "upon a slouthfull asse . . . in habit blacke . . . like to an holy monck," sick for very laziness, lets his heavy head droop, and holds in his hand a breviary which he does not read; gluttony, on "a filthie swyne," crawls by in his deformity, "his belly . . . upblowne with luxury, and eke with fatnesse swollen were his eyne; and like a crane his necke was long and fyne," drest in vine-leaves, through which one can see his body eaten by ulcers, and vomiting along the road the wine and flesh with which he is glutted. Avarice seated between "two iron coffers," "upon a camell loaden all with gold," is handling a heap of coin, with thread-bare coat, hollow cheeks, and feet stiff with gout. Envy "upon a ravenous wolfe still did chaw between his cankred teeth a venomous tode, that all the poison ran about his chaw," and his discoloured garment "ypainted full of eies," conceals a snake wound about his body. Wrath, covered with a torn and bloody robe, comes riding on a lion, brandishing about his head "a burning brond," his eyes sparkling, his face pale as ashes, grasping in his feverish hand the haft of his dagger. The strange and terrible procession passes on, led by the solemn harmony of the stanzas; and the grand music of oft repeated rhymes sustains the imagination in this fantastic world, which, with its

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mingled horrors and splendours, has just been opened to its flight.

Yet all this is little. However much mythology and chivalry can supply, they do not suffice for the needs of this poetical fancy. Spenser's characteristic is the vastness and overflow of his picturesque invention. Like Rubens, whatever he creates is beyond the region of all traditions, but complete in all parts, and expresses distinct ideas. As with Rubens, his allegory swells its proportions beyond all rule, and withdraws fancy from all law, except in so far as it is necessary to harmonise forms and colours. For, if ordinary minds receive from allegory a certain weight which oppresses them, lofty imaginations receive from it wings which carry them aloft. Freed by it from the common conditions of life, they can dare all things, beyond imitation, apart from probability, with no other guides but their inborn energy and their shadowy instincts. For three days Sir Guyon is led by the cursed spirit, the tempter Mammon, in the subterranean realm, across wonderful gardens, trees laden with golden fruits, glittering palaces, and a confusion of all worldly treasures. They have descended into the bowels of the earth, and pass through caverns, unknown abysses, silent depths. "An ugly Feend . . . with monstrous stalke behind him stept," without Guyon's knowledge, ready to devour him on the least show of covetousness. The brilliancy of the gold lights up hideous figures, and the beaming metal shines with a beauty more seductive in the gloom of the infernal prison.

"That Houses forme within was rude and strong,  
Lyke an huge cave hewne out of rocky clifte,  
From whose rough vault the ragged breaches hong

Emboist with massy gold of glorious guifte,  
And with rich metall loaded every rifte,  
That heavy ruine they did seeme to threat ;  
And over them Arachne high did lifte  
Her cunning web, and spred her subtile nett,  
Enwrapped in fowle smoke and clouds more black than lett.

Both roofe, and floore, and walls, were all of gold,  
But overgrowne with dust and old decay,  
And hid in darknes, that none could behold  
The hew thereof ; for vew of cherefull day  
Did never in that House itselfe display,  
But a faint shadow of uncertein light ;  
Such as a lamp, whose life does fade away ;  
Or as the moone, cloathed with cloudy night,  
Does show to him that walkes in feare and sad affright.

In all that rowme was nothing to be scene  
But huge great yron chests and coffers strong,  
All bard with double bends, that none could weene  
Them to enforce by violence or wrong ;  
On every side they placed were along.  
But all the grownd with sculs was scattered  
And dead mens bones, which round about were flong ;  
Whose lives, it seemed, whilome there were shed,  
And their vile carcases now left unburied. . . .

Thence, forward he him ledd and shortly brought  
Unto another rowme, whose dore forthright  
To him did open as it had beene taught :  
Therein an hundred raunges weren pight,  
And hundred founnaces all burning bright ;  
By every founnace many Feends did byde,  
Deformed creatures, horrible in sight ;  
And every Feend his busie paines applyde  
To melt the golden metall, ready to be tryde.

One with great bellowes gathered filling ayre,  
And with forst wind the fewell did inflame ;  
Another did the dying bronds repayre  
With yron tonge, and sprinckled ofte the same  
With liquid waves, fiers Vulcans rage to tame,  
Who, maystring them, renewd his former heat :  
Some scumd the drosse that from the metall came ;  
Some stird the molten owre with ladles great :  
And every one did swincke, and every one did sweat . . .

He brought him, through a darksom narrow strait,  
To a broad gate all built of beaten gold :  
The gate was open ; but therein did wayt  
A sturdie Villein, stryding stiffe and bold,  
As if the Highest God defy he would :  
In his right hand an yron club he held,  
But he himselfe was all of golden mould,  
Yet had both life and sence, and well could weld  
That cursed weapon, when his cruell foes he queld . . .

He brought him in. The rowme was large and wyde,  
As it some gyeld or solemne temple weare ;  
Many great golden pillours did upbeare  
The massy rooffe, and riches huge sustayne ;  
And every pillour decked was full deare  
With crownes, and diademes, and titles vaine,  
Which mortall princes wore whiles they on earth did rayne.

A route of people there assembled were,  
Of every sort and nation under skye,  
Which with great uprore preaced to draw nere  
To th' upper part, where was advaunced hye  
A stately siege of soveraine maiestye ;  
And thereon satt a Woman gorgeous gay,  
And richly cladd in robes of royaltie,  
That never earthly prince in such aray  
His glory did enhaunce, and pompous pryde display . . .

There, as in glistring glory she did sitt,  
She held a great gold chaine ylincked well,  
Whose upper end to highest heven was knitt,  
And lower part did reach to lowest hell." <sup>1</sup>

No artist's dream matches these visions : the glow of the furnaces beneath the vaults of the cavern, the lights flickering over the crowded figures, the throne, and the strange glitter of the gold shining in every direction through the darkness. The allegory assumes gigantic proportions. When the object is to show temperance struggling with temptations, Spenser deems it necessary to mass all the temptations together. He is treating of a general virtue ; and as such a virtue is capable of every sort of resistance, he requires from it every sort of resistance alike ;—after the test of gold, that of pleasure. Thus the grandest and the most exquisite spectacles follow and are contrasted with each other, and all are supernatural ; the graceful and the terrible are side by side,—the happy gardens close by with the cursed subterranean cavern.

" No gate, but like one, being goodly dight  
With bowes and braunches, which did broad dilate  
Their clasping armes in wanton wreathings intricate :  
So fashioned a porch with rare device,  
Archt over head with an embracing vine,  
Whose bounches hanging downe seemed to entice  
All passers-by to taste their lushious wine,  
And did themselves into their hands incline,  
As freely offering to be gathered ;  
Some deepe empurpled as the hyacine,  
Some as the rubine laughing sweetely red,  
Some like faire emeraudes, not yet well ripened.

<sup>1</sup> *The Faerie Queene*, ii. c. 7, st. 28-46.

And in the midst of all a fountaine stood,  
 Of richest substance that on earth might bee,  
 So pure and shiny that the silver flood  
 Through every channell running one might see;  
 Most goodly it with curious ymageree  
 Was over-wrought, and shapen of naked boyes,  
 Of which some seemed with lively iollitee  
 To fly about, playing their wanton toyes,  
 Whylest others did themselves embay in liquid loyes.

And over all of purest gold was spread  
 A trayle of yvie in his native hew;  
 For the rich metall was so coloured,  
 That wight, who did not well avis'd it vew,  
 Would surely deeme it to bee yvie trew;  
 Low his lascivious armes adown did creepe,  
 That themselves dipping in the silver dew  
 Their fleecy flowres they fearfully did steepe,  
 Which drops of christall seemd for wantones to weep.

Innit streames continually did well  
 Out of this fountaine, sweet and faire to see,  
 The which into an ample laver fell,  
 And shortly grew to so great quantitie,  
 That like a little lake it seemd to bee;  
 Whose depth exceeded not three cubits hight,  
 That through the waves one might the bottom see,  
 All pay'd beneath with jasper shining bright,  
 That seemd the fountaine in that sea did sayle upright...

The ioyous birdes, shrouded in chearefull shade,  
 Their notes unto the voice attempted sweet;  
 Th' angelicall soft trembling voyces made  
 To th' instruments divine response meet;  
 The silver-sounding instruments did meet  
 With the base murmur of the waters fall;  
 The waters fall with difference discreet,

Now soft, now loud, unto the wind did call ;  
The gentle warbling wind low answered to all . . .

Upon a bed of roses she was layd,  
As faint through heat, or dight to pleasant sin ;  
And was arayd, or rather disarayd,  
All in a vele of silke and silver thin,  
That hid no whit her alabaster skin,  
But rather shewd more white, if more might bee :  
More subtile web Arachne cannot spin ;  
Nor the fine nets, which oft we woven see  
Of scorched deaw, do not in th' ayre more lightly flee.

Her snowy brest was bare to ready spoyle  
Of hungry eies, which n' ote therewith be fild ;  
And yet, through languour of her late sweet toyle,  
Few drops, more cleare then nectar, forth distild,  
That like pure orient perles adowne it trild ;  
And her faire eyes, sweet smyling in delight,  
Moystened their fierie beames, with which she thrild  
Fraile harts, yet quenched not, like starry lights  
Which sparckling on the silent waves, does seeme more bright."<sup>1</sup>

Do we find here nothing but fairy land? Yes; here are finished pictures true and complete, composed with a painter's feeling, with choice of tints and outlines; our eyes are delighted by them. This reclining Acrasia has the pose of a goddess, or of one of Titian's courtesans. An Italian artist might copy these gardens, these flowing waters, these sculptured loves, those wreaths of creeping ivy thick with glossy leaves and fleecy flowers. Just before, in the infernal depths, the lights, with their long streaming rays, were fine, half-smothered by the darkness; the lofty throne in the vast hall, between the pillars, in the midst of a swarm-

<sup>1</sup> *The Faerie Queene*, ii. c. 12, st. 53-78.



ing multitude, connected all the forms around it by drawing all looks towards one centre. The poet, here and throughout, is a colourist and an architect. However fantastic his world may be, it is not factitious; if it does not exist, it might have been; indeed, it should have been; it is the fault of circumstances if they do not so group themselves as to bring it to pass; taken by itself, it possesses that internal harmony by which a real thing, even a still higher harmony, exists, inasmuch as, without any regard to real things, it is altogether, and in its least detail, constructed with a view to beauty. Art has made its appearance: this is the great characteristic of the age, which distinguishes the *Fabrie Queens* from all similar tales heaped up by the middle-age. Incoherent, mutilated, they lie like rubbish, or rough-hewn stones, which the weak hands of the trouvères could not build into a monument. At last the poets and artists appear, and with them the conception of beauty, to wit, the idea of general effect. They understand proportions, relations, contrasts; they compose. In their hands the blurred vague sketch becomes defined, complete, separate; it assumes colour—is made a picture. Every object thus conceived and imaged acquires a definite existence as soon as it assumes a true form; centuries after, it will be acknowledged and admired, and men will be touched by it; and more, they will be touched by its author; for, besides the object which he paints, the poet paints himself. His ruling idea is stamped upon the work which it produces and controls. Spenser is superior to his subject, comprehends it fully, frames it with a view to its end, in order to impress upon it the proper mark of his soul and his genius. Each story is modulated with respect to another,

and all with respect to a certain effect which is being worked out. Thus a beauty issues from this harmony,—the beauty in the poet's heart,—which his whole work strives to express; a noble and yet a cheerful beauty, made up of moral elevation and sensuous seductions, English in sentiment, Italian in externals, chivalric in subject, modern in its perfection, representing a unique and wonderful epoch, the appearance of paganism in a Christian race, and the worship of form by an imagination of the North.

### § 3. PROSE.

#### I.

Such an epoch can scarcely last, and the poetic vitality wears itself out by its very efflorescence, so that its expansion leads to its decline. From the beginning of the seventeenth century, the subsidence of manners and genius grows apparent. Enthusiasm and respect decline. The minions and court-fops intrigue and pilfer, amid pedantry, puerility, and show. The court plunders, and the nation murmurs. The Commons begin to show a stern front, and the king, scolding them like a schoolmaster, gives way before them like a little boy. This sorry monarch (James I.) suffers himself to be bullied by his favourites, writes to them like a gossip, calls himself a Solomon, airs his literary vanity, and in granting an audience to a courtier, recommends him to become a scholar, and expects to be complimented on his own scholarly attainments. The dignity of the government is weakened, and the people's loyalty is cooled. Royalty declines, and revolution is fostered. At the same time, the noble chivalric paganism degen-

erates into a base and coarse sensuality. The king, we are told, on one occasion, had got so drunk with his royal brother Christian of Denmark, that they both had to be carried to bed. Sir John Harrington says :

"The ladies abandon their sobriety, and are seen to roll about in intoxication. . . . The Lady who did play the Queen's part (in the Masque of the Queen of Sheba) did carry most precious gifts to both their Majesties ; but, forgetting the steppes arising to the canopy, overset her caskets into his Daniah Majesties lap, and fell at his feet, tho I rather think it was in his face. Much was the hurry and confusion ; cloths and napkins were at hand, to make all clean. His Majesty then got up and would dance with the Queen of Sheba ; but he fell down and humbled himself before her, and was carried to an inner chamber and laid on a bed of state ; which was not a little defiled with the presents of the Queen which had been bestowed on his garments ; such as wine, cream, jelly, beverage, cakes, spices, and other good matters. The entertainment and show went forward, and most of the presenters went backward, or fell down ; wine did so occupy their upper chambers. Now did appear, in rich dress, Hope, Faith, and Charity : Hope did assay to speak, but wine rendered her endeavours so feeble that she withdrew, and hoped the king would excuse her brevity : Faith . . . left the court in a staggering condition. . . . They were both sick and spewing in the lower hall. Next came Victory, who . . . by a strange medley of versification . . . and after much lamentable utterance was led away like a silly captive, and laid to sleep in the outer steps of the anti-chamber. As for Peace, she most rudely made war with her olive branch, and laid on the pates of those who did oppose her coming. I ne'er did see such lack of good order, discretion, and sobriety in our Queen's days."<sup>1</sup>

Observe that these tipsy women were great ladies.

<sup>1</sup> *Nuga Antiqua*, i. 349 *et passim*.

The reason is, that the grand ideas which introduce an epoch, end, in their exhaustion, by preserving nothing but their vices; the proud sentiment of natural life becomes a vulgar appeal to the senses. An entrance, an arch of triumph under James I., often represented obscenities; and later, when the sensual instincts, exasperated by Puritan tyranny, begin to raise their heads once more, we shall find under the Restoration excess revelling in its low vices, and triumphing in its shamelessness.

Meanwhile literature undergoes a change; the powerful breeze which had wafted it on, and which, amidst singularity, refinements, exaggerations, had made it great, slackened and diminished. With Carew, Suckling, and Herrick, prettiness takes the place of the beautiful. That which strikes them is no longer the general features of things; and they no longer try to express the inner character of what they describe. They no longer possess that liberal conception, that instinctive penetration, by which we sympathise with objects, and grow capable of creating them anew. They no longer boast of that overflow of emotions, that excess of ideas and images, which compelled a man to relieve himself by words, to act externally, to represent freely and boldly the interior drama which made his whole body and heart tremble. They are rather wits of the court, cavaliers of fashion, who wish to show off their imagination and style. In their hands love becomes gallantry; they write songs, fugitive pieces, compliments to the ladies. There are no more upwellings from the heart. They write eloquent phrases in order to be applauded, and flattering exaggerations in order to please. The divine faces, the serious or profound looks, the virgin or impassioned

expressions which burst forth at every step in the early poets, have disappeared ; here we see nothing but agreeable countenances, painted in agreeable verses. Blackguardism is not far off ; we meet with it already in Suckling, and crudity to boot, and prosaic epicurism ; their sentiment is expressed before long, in such a phrase as : " Let us amuse ourselves, and a fig for the rest." The only objects they can still paint, are little graceful things, a kiss, a May-day festivity, a dewy primrose, a daffodil, a marriage morning, a bee.<sup>1</sup> Herrick and Suckling

<sup>1</sup> " Some asked me where the Rubies grew,  
And nothing I did say ;  
But with my finger pointed to  
The lips of Julia.  
Some ask'd how Pearls did grow, and where ;  
Then spake I to my girl,  
To part her lips, and shew me there  
The quarelets of Pearl.  
One ask'd me where the roses grew ;  
I bade him not go seek ;  
But forthwith bade my Julia show  
A bud in either cheek."

HERRICK's *Hesperides*, ed. Walford, 1859 ;  
*The Rock of Rubies*, p. 32.

" About the sweet bag of a bee,  
Two Cupids fell at odds ;  
And whose the pretty prize shu'd be,  
They vow'd to ask the Gods.  
Which Venus hearing, thither came,  
And for their boldness stript them ;  
And taking thence from each his flame,  
With rods of mirtle whipt them.  
Which done, to still their wanton cries,  
When quiet grown sh'ad seen them,  
She kist and wip'd their dove-like eyes,  
And gave the bag between them."

HERRICK, *Ibid.* ; *The Bag of the Bee*, p. 41.

especially produce little exquisite poems, delicate, ever pleasant or agreeable, like those attributed to Anacreon, or those which abound in the *Anthology*. In fact, here, as at the Grecian period alluded to, we are in the decline of paganism ; energy departs, the reign of the agreeable begins. People do not relinquish the worship of beauty and pleasure, but dally with them. They deck and fit them to their taste ; they cease to subdue and bend men, who enjoy them whilst they amuse them. It is the last beam of a setting sun ; the genuine poetic

“ Why so pale and wan, fond lover ?  
 Pr'ythee, why so pale ?  
 Will, when looking well can't move her,  
 Looking ill prevail ?  
 Pr'ythee, why so pale ?  
 Why so dull and mute, young sinner ?  
 Pr'ythee, why so mute ?  
 Will, when speaking well can't win her,  
 Saying nothing do't ?  
 Pr'ythee, why so mute ?  
 Quit, quit for shame : this will not move,  
 This cannot take her ;  
 If of herself she will not love,  
 Nothing can make her.  
 The devil take her ! ”

Sir JOHN SUCKLING's *Works*, ed. A. Suckling,  
 1836, p. 70.

“ As when a lady, walking Flora's bower,  
 Picks here a pink, and there a gilly-flower,  
 Now plucks a violet from her purple bed,  
 And then a primrose, the year's maidenhead,  
 There nips the brier, here the lover's pansy,  
 Shifting her dainty pleasures with her fancy,  
 This on her arms, and that she lists to wear  
 Upon the borders of her curious hair ;  
 At length a rose-bud (passing all the rest)  
 She plucks, and bosoms in her lily breast.

QUARLES. *Stanzas*.

sentiment dies out with Sedley, Waller, and the rhyme-sters of the Restoration; they write prose in verse; their heart is on a level with their style, and with an exact language we find the commencement of a new age and a new art.

Side by side with prettiness comes affectation; it is the second mark of the decadence. Instead of writing to express things, they write to say them well; they outbid their neighbours, and strain every mode of speech; they push art over on the side to which it had a leaning; and as in this age it had a leaning towards vehemence and imagination, they pile up their emphasis and colouring. A jargon always springs out of a style. In all arts, the first masters, the inventors, discover the idea, steep themselves in it, and leave it to effect its outward form. Then come the second class, the imitators, who sedulously repeat this form, and alter it by exaggeration. Some nevertheless have talent, as Quarles, Herbert, Habington, Donne in particular, a pungent satirist, of terrible crudeness,<sup>1</sup> a powerful poet, of a precise and intense imagination, who still preserves something of the energy and thrill of the original inspiration.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See, in particular, his satire against courtiers. The following is against imitators.

“ But he is worst, who (beggarly) doth chaw  
Others wit's fruits, and in his ravenous maw  
Rankly digested, doth those things out-spew,  
As his owne things; and they 're his owne, 't is true,  
For if one eate my meate, though it be knowne  
The meat was mine, th' excrement is his owne.”

DONNE's *Satires*, 1639. *Satire* ii. p. 128.

■ “ When I behold a stream, which from the spring  
Doth with doubtful melodious murmuring,  
Or in a speechless slumber calmly ride  
Her wedded channel's bosom, and there chide

But he deliberately spoils all these gifts, and succeeds with great difficulty in concocting a piece of nonsense. For instance, the impassioned poets had said to their mistress, that if they lost her, they should hate all other women. Donne, in order to eclipse them, says :

“ O do not die, for I shall hate  
All women so, when thou art gone,  
That thee I shall not celebrate  
When I remember thou wast one.”<sup>1</sup>

Twenty times while reading him we rub our brow, and ask with astonishment, how a man could have so tormented and contorted himself, strained his style, refined on his refinement, hit upon such absurd comparisons ? But this was the spirit of the age ; they made an effort to be ingeniously absurd. A flea had bitten Donne and his mistress, and he says :

“ This flea is you and I, and this  
Our marriage bed and marriage temple is.  
Though Parents grudge, and you, w’ are met,  
And cloyster’d in these living walls of Jet.  
Though use make you apt to kill me,  
Let not to that selfe-murder added be,  
And sacrilege, three sins in killing three.”<sup>2</sup>

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And bend her brows, and swell, if any bough  
Does but stoop down to kiss her utmost brow ;  
Yet if her often gnawing kisses win  
The traitorous banks to gape and let her in,  
She rusheth violently and doth divorce  
Her from her native and her long kept-course,  
And roares, and braves it, and in gallant scorn  
In flatt’ring eddies promising return,  
She flouts her channel, which thenceforth is dry,  
Then say I : That is she, and this am I.”—DONNE, *Elegy vi.*

<sup>1</sup> *Poems*, 1639 : *A Flever*, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* *The Flea*, p. 1.



The Marquis de Mascarille<sup>1</sup> never found anything to equal this. Would you have believed a writer could invent such absurdities? She and he made but one, for both are but one with the flea, and so one could not be killed without the other. Observe that the wise Malherbe wrote very similar enormities, in the *Tears of St. Peter*, and that the sonneteers of Italy and Spain reach simultaneously the same height of folly, and you will agree that throughout Europe at that time they were at the close of a poetical epoch.

On this boundary line of a closing and a dawning literature a poet appeared, one of the most approved and illustrious of his time, Abraham Cowley,<sup>2</sup> a precocious child, a reader and a versifier like Pope, and who, like Pope, having known passions less than books, busied himself less about things than about words. Literary exhaustion has seldom been more manifest. He possesses all the capacity to say whatever pleases him, but he has precisely nothing to say. The substance has vanished, leaving in its place an empty form. In vain he tries the epic, the Pindaric strophe, all kinds of stanzas, odes, short lines, long lines; in vain he calls to his assistance botanical and philosophical similes, all the erudition of the university, all the recollections of antiquity, all the ideas of new science: we yawn as we read him. Except in a few descriptive verses, two or three graceful tendernesses,<sup>3</sup> he feels nothing, he speaks only; he is a poet of the brain. His collection of

<sup>1</sup> A valet in Molière's *Les Précieuses Ridicules*, who apes and exaggerates his master's manners and style, and pretends to be a marquess. He also appears in *L'Étourdi* and *Le dépit Amoureux*, by the same author.—Tr.

<sup>2</sup> 1608-1667. I refer to the eleventh edition of 1710.

<sup>3</sup> *The Spring* (*The Mistress*, i. 72).

amorous pieces is but a vehicle for a scientific test, and serves to show that he has read the authors, that he knows geography, that he is well versed in anatomy, that he has a smattering of medicine and astronomy, that he has at his service comparisons and allusions enough to rack the brains of his readers. He will speak in this wise :

“ Beauty, thou active—passive Ill !  
Which dy’st thyself as fast as thou dost kill ! ”

or will remark that his mistress is to blame for spending three hours every morning at her toilet, because

“ They make that Beauty Tyranny,  
That’s else a Civil-government.”

After reading two hundred pages, you feel disposed to box his ears. You have to think, by way of consolation, that every grand age must draw to a close, that this one could not do so otherwise, that the old glow of enthusiasm, the sudden flood of rapture, images, whimsical and audacious fancies, which once rolled through the minds of men, arrested now and cooled down, could only exhibit dross, a curdling scum, a multitude of brilliant and offensive points. You say to yourself that, after all, Cowley had perhaps talent ; you find that he had in fact one, a new talent, unknown to the old masters, the sign of a new culture, which needs other manners, and announces a new society. Cowley had these manners, and belongs to this society. He was a well-governed, reasonable, well-informed, polished, well-educated man, who after twelve years of service and writing in France, under Queen Henrietta, retires at last wisely into the country, where he studies natural history, and prepares

a treatise on religion, philosophising on men and life, fertile in general reflections and ideas, a moralist, bidding his executor "to let nothing stand in his writings which might seem the least in the world to be an offence against religion or good manners." Such intentions and such a life produce and indicate less a poet, that is, a seer, a creator, than a literary man, I mean a man who can think and speak, and who therefore ought to have read much, learned much, written much, ought to possess a calm and clear mind, to be accustomed to polite society, sustained conversation, pleasantry. In fact, Cowley is an author by profession, the oldest of those, who in England deserve the name. His prose is as easy and sensible as his poetry is contorted and unreasonable. A polished man, writing for polished men, pretty much as he would speak to them in a drawing-room,—this I take to be the idea which they had of a good author in the seventeenth century. It is the idea which Cowley's Essays leave of his character; it is the kind of talent which the writers of the coming age take for their model; and he is the first of that grave and amiable group which, continued in Temple, reaches so far as to include Addison.

## II.

Having reached this point, the Renaissance seemed to have attained its limit, and, like a drooping and faded flower, to be ready to leave its place for a new bud which began to spring up amongst its withered leaves. At all events, a living and unexpected shoot sprang from the old declining stock. At the moment when art languished, science shot forth; the whole labour of the age ended in this. The fruits are not unlike; on the con-

trary, they come from the same sap, and by the diversity of the shape only manifest two distinct periods of the inner growth which has produced them. Every art ends in a science, and all poetry in a philosophy. For science and philosophy do but translate into precise formulas the original conceptions which art and poetry render sensible by imaginary figures: when once the idea of an epoch is manifested in verse by ideal creations, it naturally comes to be expressed in prose by positive arguments. That which had struck men on escaping from ecclesiastical oppression and monkish asceticism was the pagan idea of a life true to nature, and freely developed. They had found nature buried behind scholasticism, and they had expressed it in poems and paintings; in Italy by superb healthy corporeality, in England by vehement and unconventional spirituality, with such divination of its laws, instincts, and forms, that we might extract from their theatre and their pictures a complete theory of soul and body. When enthusiasm is past, curiosity begins. The sentiment of beauty gives way to the need of truth. The theory contained in works of imagination frees itself. The gaze continues fixed on nature, not to admire now, but to understand. From painting we pass to anatomy, from the drama to moral philosophy, from grand poetical divinations to great scientific views; the second continue the first, and the same mind displays itself in both; for what art had represented, and science proceeds to observe, are living things, with their complex and complete structure, set in motion by their internal forces, with no supernatural intervention. Artists and savants, all set out, without knowing it themselves, from the same master conception, to wit, that nature subsists of

herself, that every existence has in its own womb the source of its action, that the causes of events are the innate laws of things ; an all-powerful idea, from which was to issue the modern civilisation, and which, at the time I write of, produced in England and Italy, as before in Greece, genuine sciences, side by side with a complete art : after da Vinci and Michel Angelo, the school of anatomists, mathematicians, naturalists, ending with Galileo ; after Spenser, Ben Jonson, and Shakspeare, the school of thinkers who surround Bacon and lead up to Harvey.

We have not far to look for this school. In the interregnum of Christianity the dominating bent of mind belongs to it. It was paganism which reigned in Elizabeth's court, not only in letters, but in doctrine, —a paganism of the north, always serious, generally sombre, but which was based, like that of the south, on natural forces. In some men all Christianity had passed away ; many proceeded to atheism through excess of rebellion and debauchery, like Marlowe and Greene. With others, like Shakspeare, the idea of God scarcely makes its appearance ; they see in our poor short human life only a dream, and beyond it the long sad sleep : for them, death is the goal of life ; at most a dark gulf, into which man plunges, uncertain of the issue. If they carry their gaze beyond, they perceive,<sup>1</sup> not the spiritual soul welcomed into a purer world, but the corpse abandoned to the damp earth, or the ghost hovering about the churchyard. They speak like sceptics or superstitious men, never as true believers. Their heroes

<sup>1</sup> See in Shakspeare, *The Tempest*, *Measure for Measure*, *Hamlet* : in Beaumont and Fletcher, *Thierry and Theodoret*, Act iv. ; Webster, *passim*.





*JOHN SELDEN*





have human, not religious virtues; against crime they rely on honour and the love of the beautiful, not on piety and the fear of God. If others, at intervals, like Sidney and Spenser, catch a glimpse of the Divine, it is as a vague ideal light, a sublime Platonic phantom, which has no resemblance to a personal God, a strict inquisitor of the slightest motions of the heart. He appears at the summit of things, like the splendid crown of the world, but He does not weigh upon human life; He leaves it intact and free, only turning it towards the beautiful. Man does not know as yet the sort of narrow prison in which official cant and respectable creeds were, later on, to confine activity and intelligence. Even the believers, sincere Christians like Bacon and Sir Thomas Browne, discard all oppressive sternness, reduce Christianity to a sort of moral poetry, and allow naturalism to subsist beneath religion. In such a broad and open channel, speculation could spread its wings. With Lord Herbert appeared a systematic deism; with Milton and Algernon Sidney, a philosophical religion; Clarendon went so far as to compare Lord Falkland's gardens to the groves of Academe. Against the rigorism of the Puritans, Chillingworth, Hales, Hooker, the greatest doctors of the English Church, give a large place to natural reason,—so large, that never, even to this day, has it made such an advance.

An astonishing irruption of facts—the discovery of America, the revival of antiquity, the restoration of philology, the invention of the arts, the development of industries, the march of human curiosity over the whole of the past and the whole of the globe—came to furnish subject-matter, and prose began its reign. Sidney

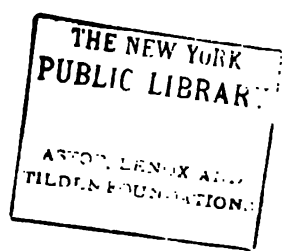
Wilson, Ascham, and Puttenham explored the rules of style; Hackluyt and Purchas compiled the cyclopædia of travel and the description of every land; Holinshed, Speed, Raleigh, Stowe, Knolles, Daniel, Thomas May, Lord Herbert, founded history; Camden, Spelman, Cotton, Usher, and Selden inaugurate scholarship; a legion of patient workers, of obscure collectors, of literary pioneers, amassed, arranged, and sifted the documents which Sir Robert Cotton and Sir Thomas Bodley stored up in their libraries; whilst utopians, moralists, painters of manners—Thomas More, Joseph Hall, John Earle, Owen Feltham, Burton—described and passed judgment on the modes of life, continued with Fuller, Sir Thomas Browne, and Isaac Walton up to the middle of the next century, and add to the number of controversialists and politicians who, with Hooker, Taylor, Chillingworth, Algernon Sidney, Harrington, study religion, society, church and state. A copious and confused fermentation, from which abundance of thoughts rose, but few notable books. Noble prose, such as was heard at the court of Louis XIV., in the house of Pollio, in the schools at Athens, such as rhetorical and sociable nations know how to produce, was altogether lacking. These men had not the spirit of analysis, the art of following step by step the natural order of ideas, nor the spirit of conversation, the talent never to weary or shock others. Their imagination is too little regulated, and their manners too little polished. They who had mixed most in the world, even Sidney, speak roughly what they think, and as they think it. Instead of glossing they exaggerate. They blurt out all, and withhold nothing. When they do not employ excessive compliments, they take to coarse jokes. They are ignorant of measured

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liveliness, refined raillery, delicate flattery. They rejoice in gross puns, dirty allusions. They mistake involved charades and grotesque images for wit. Though they are great lords and ladies, they talk like ill-bred persons, lovers of buffoonery, of shows, and bear-fights. With some, as Overbury or Sir Thomas Browne, prose is so much run over by poetry, that it covers its narrative with images, and hides ideas under its pictures. They load their style with flowery comparisons, which produce one another, and mount one above another, so that sense disappears, and ornament only is visible. In short, they are generally pedants, still stiff with the rust of the school; they divide and subdivide, propound theses, definitions; they argue solidly and heavily, and quote their authors in Latin, and even in Greek; they square their massive periods, and learnedly knock their adversaries down, and their readers too, as a natural consequence. They are never on the prose-level, but always above or below—above by their poetic genius, below by the weight of their education and the barbarism of their manners. But they think seriously and for themselves; they are deliberate; they are convinced and touched by what they say. Even in the compiler we find a force and loyalty of spirit, which give confidence and cause pleasure. Their writings are like the powerful and heavy engravings of their contemporaries, the maps of Hofnagel for instance, so harsh and so instructive; their conception is sharp and clear; they have the gift of perceiving every object, not under a general aspect, like the classical writers, but specially and individually. It is not man in the abstract, the citizen as he is everywhere, the countryman as such, that they represent, but James or Thomas, Smith or Brown, of



such a parish, from such an office, with such and such attitude or dress, distinct from all others; in short, they see, not the idea, but the individual. Imagine the disturbance that such a disposition produces in a man's head, how the regular order of ideas becomes deranged by it; how every object, with the infinite medley of its forms, properties, appendages, will thenceforth fasten itself by a hundred points of contact unforeseen to other objects, and bring before the mind a series and a family; what boldness language will derive from it; what familiar, picturesque, absurd words, will break forth in succession; how the dash, the unforeseen, the originality and inequality of invention, will stand out. Imagine, at the same time, what a hold this form of mind has on objects, how many facts it condenses in each conception; what a mass of personal judgments, foreign authorities, suppositions, guesses, imaginations, it spreads over every subject; with what venturesome and creative fecundity it engenders both truth and conjecture. It is an extraordinary chaos of thoughts and forms, often abortive, still more often barbarous, sometimes grand. But from this superfluity something lasting and great is produced, namely science, and we have only to examine more closely into one or two of these works to see the new creation emerge from the blocks and the debris.

### III.

Two writers especially display this state of mind. The first, Robert Burton, a clergyman and university recluse, who passed his life in libraries, and dabbled in all the sciences, as learned as Rabelais, having an inexhaustible and overflowing memory; unequal, more-

over, gifted with enthusiasm, and spasmodically gay, but as a rule sad and morose, to the extent of confessing in his epitaph that melancholy made up his life and his death; in the first place original, liking his own common sense, and one of the earliest models of that singular English mood which, withdrawing man within himself, develops in him, at one time imagination, at another scrupulosity, at another oddity, and makes of him, according to circumstances, a poet, an eccentric, a humorist, a madman, or a puritan. He read on for thirty years, put an encyclopædia into his head, and now, to amuse and relieve himself, takes a folio of blank paper. Twenty lines of a poet, a dozen lines of a treatise on agriculture, a folio page of heraldry, a description of rare fishes, a paragraph of a sermon on patience, the record of the fever fits of hypochondria, the history of the particle *that*, a scrap of metaphysics, —this is what passes through his brain in a quarter of an hour: it is a carnival of ideas and phrases, Greek, Latin, German, French, Italian, philosophical, geometrical, medical, poetical, astrological, musical, pedagogic, heaped one on the other; an enormous medley, a prodigious mass of jumbled quotations, jostling thoughts, with the vivacity and the transport of a feast of unreason.

“ This roving humour (though not with like success) I have ever had, and, like a ranging spaniel that barks at every bird he sees, leaving his game, I have followed all, saving that which I should, and may justly complain, and truly, *qui ubique est, nusquam est*, which Gesner did in modesty, that I have read many books, but to little purpose, for want of good method, I have confusedly tumbled over divers authors in our libraries with small profit, for want of art, order, memory, judgment. I

never travelled but in map or card, in which my unconfined thoughts have freely expatiated, as having ever been especially delighted with the study of cosmography. Saturn was lord of my geniture, culminating, etc., and Mars principal significator of manners, in partile conjunction with mine ascendent; both fortunate in their houses, etc. I am not poor, I am not rich; *nihil est, nihil deest*; I have little; I want nothing: all my treasure is in Minerva's tower. Greater preferment as I could never get, so am I not in debt for it. I have a competency (*laus Deo*) from my noble and munificent patrons. Though I live still a collegiat student, as Democritus in his garden, and lead a monastique life, *ipse mihi theatrum*, sequestred from those tumults and troubles of the world, *et tanquam in speculâ positus* (as he said), in some high place above you all, like *Stotus sapiens, omnia sæcula præterita præsentiaque videns, uno velut intuitu*, I hear and see what is done abroad, how others run, ride, turmoil, and macerate themselves in court and countrey. Far from these wrangling lawsuits, *aulæ vanitatem, fori ambitionem, ridere mecum soleo*: I laugh at all, only secure, lest my suit go amiss, my ships perish, corn and cattle miscarry, trade decay; I have no wife nor children, good or bad, to provide for; a mere spectator of other men's fortunes and adventures, and how they act their parts, which methinks are diversely presented unto me, as from a common theatre or scene. I hear new news every day: and those ordinary rumours of war, plagues, fires, inundations, thefts, murders, massacres, meteors, comets, spectrums, prodigies, apparitions; of towns taken, cities besieged in France, Germany, Turkey, Persia, Poland, etc., daily musters and preparations, and such like, which these tempestuous times afford, battles fought, so many men slain, monomachies, shipwracks, piracies, and sea-fights, peace, leagues, stratagems, and fresh alarms—a vast confusion of vows, wishes, actions, edicts, petitions, lawsuits, pleas, laws, proclamations, complaints, grievances,—are daily brought to our ears: new books every day. pamphlets, currantoes, stories, whole catalogues

of volumes of all sorts, new paradoxes, opinions, schisms, heresies, controversies in philosophy, religion, etc. Now come tidings of weddings, maskings, mummeries, entertainments, jubiles, embassies, tilts and tournaments, trophies, triumphs, revels, sports, playes: then again, as in a new shifted scene, treasons, cheating tricks, robberies, enormous villanies in all kinds, funerals, burials, death of princes, new discoveries, expeditions; now comical, then tragical matters. To-day we hear of new lords and officers created, to-morrow of some great men deposed, and then again of fresh honours conferred: one is let loose, another imprisoned: one purchaseth, another breaketh: he thrives, his neighbour turns bankrupt; now plenty, then again dearth and famine; one runs, another rides, wrangles, laughs, weeps, etc. Thus I daily hear, and such like, both private and publick news." <sup>1</sup>

"For what a world of books offers itself, in all subjects, arts, and sciences, to the sweet content and capacity of the reader? In arithmetick, geometry, perspective, optick, astronomy, architecture, *sculptura*, *pictura*, of which so many and such elaborate treatises are of late written: in mechanicks and their mysteries, military matters, navigation, riding of horses, fencing, swimming, gardening, planting, great tomes of husbandry, cookery, falconry, hunting, fishing, fowling, etc., with exquisite pictures of all sports, games, and what not. In musick, metaphysicks, natural and moral philosophy, philologie, in policy, heraldry, genealogy, chronology, etc., they afford great tomes, or those studies of antiquity, etc., *et quid subtilius arithmetico inventionibus? quid jucundius musicis rationibus? quid divinius astronomiis? quid rectius geometricis demonstrationibus?* What so sure, what so pleasant? He that shall but see the geometrical tower of Garezenda at Bologna in Italy, the steeple and clock at Strasborough, will admire the effects of art, or that engine of Archimedes to remove the earth itself, if he had but a place to fasten

<sup>1</sup> *Anatomy of Melancholy*, 12th ed. 1821, 2 vols.: Democritus to the Reader, i. 4.

his instrument. *Archimedis cochlea*, and rare devises to corrivate waters, musick instruments, and trisyllable echoes again, again, and again repeated, with miriades of such. What vast tomes are extant in law, physick, and divinity, for profit, pleasure, practice, speculation, in verse or prose, etc. ! Their names alone are the subject of whole volumes ; we have thousands of authors of all sorts, many great libraries, full well furnished, like so many dishes of meat, served out for several palates, and he is a very block that is affected with none of them. Some take an infinite delight to study the very languages wherein these books are written—Hebrew, Greek, Syriack, Chalde, Arabick, etc. Methinks it would well please any man to look upon a geographical map (*suavi animum delectatione allicere, ob incredibilem rerum varietatem et jucunditatem, et ad plenioram sui cognitionem excitare*), chorographical, topographical delineations ; to behold, as it were, all the remote provinces, towns, cities of the world, and never to go forth of the limits of his study ; to measure, by the scale and compasse, their extent, distance, examine their site. Charles the Great (as Platina writes) had three faire silver tables, in one of which superficies was a large map of Constantinople, in the second Rome neatly engraved, in the third an exquisite description of the whole world ; and much delight he took in them. What greater pleasure can there now be, than to view those elaborate maps of Ortelius, Mercator, Hondius, etc. ? to peruse those books of cities put out by Braunus and Hogenbergius ? to read those exquisite descriptions of Maginus, Munster, Herrera, Laet, Merula, Boterus, Leander Albertus, Camden, Leo Afer, Adricomius, Nic. Gerbelius, etc. ? those famous expeditions of Christopher Columbus, Americus Vespucius, Marcus Polus the Venetian, Lod. Vertomannus, Aloysius Cadamustus, etc. ? those accurate diaries of Portugals, Hollanders, of Bartison, Oliver a Nort, etc., Hacluit's Voyages, Pet. Martyr's Decades, Benzo, Lerijs, Linschoten's relations, those Hodæporicons of Jod. a Meggen, Brocarde the Monke, Bredembachius, Jo. Dublinius, Sands, etc., to Jerusalem, Egypt,

and other remote places of the world ? those pleasant itineraries of Paulus Hentzerus, Jodocus Sincerus, Dux Polonus, etc. ? to read Bellonius observations, P. Gillius his surveyes ; those parts of America, set out, and curiously cut in pictures, by Fratres a Bry ? To see a well cut herbal, hearbs, trees, flowers, plants, all vegetals, expressed in their proper colours to the life, as that of Matthiolus upon Dioscorides, Delacampius, Lobel, Bauhinus, and that last voluminous and mighty herbal of Besler of Nuremberge ; wherein almost every plant is to his own bignesse. To see birds, beasts, and fishes of the sea, spiders, gnats, serpents, flies, etc., all creatures set out by the same art, and truly expressed in lively colours, with an exact description of their natures, vertues, qualities, etc., as hath been accurately performed by Ælian, Gesner, Ulysses Aldrovandus, Bellonius, Rondoletius, Hippolytus Salvianus, etc.”<sup>1</sup>

He is never-ending ; words, phrases, overflow, are heaped up, overlap each other, and flow on, carrying the reader along, deafened, stunned, half-drowned, unable to touch ground in the deluge. Burton is inexhaustible. There are no ideas which he does not iterate under fifty forms : when he has exhausted his own, he pours out upon us other men’s—the classics, the rarest authors, known only by savants—authors rarer still, known only to the learned ; he borrows from all. Underneath these deep caverns of erudition and science, there is one blacker and more unknown than all the others, filled with forgotten authors, with crack-jaw names, Besler of Nuremberg, Adricomius, Linschoten, Brocarde, Bredenbachius. Amidst all these antediluvian monsters, bristling with Latin terminations, he is at his ease ; he sports with them, laughs, skips from one to the other, drives them all abreast. He is like old

<sup>1</sup> *Anatomy of Melancholy*, i. part 2, sec. 2, Mem. 4, p. 420, *et passim*.

Proteus, the sturdy rover, who in one hour, with his team of hippopotami, makes the circuit of the ocean.

What subject does he take? Melancholy, his own individual mood; and he takes it like a schoolman. None of St. Thomas Aquinas' treatises is more regularly constructed than his. This torrent of erudition flows in geometrically planned channels, turning off at right angles without deviating by a line. At the head of every part you will find a synoptical and analytical table, with hyphens, brackets, each division begetting its subdivisions, each subdivision its sections, each section its subsections: of the malady in general, of melancholy in particular, of its nature, its seat, its varieties, causes, symptoms, prognosis; of its cure by permissible means, by forbidden means, by dietetic means, by pharmaceutical means. After the scholastic process, he descends from the general to the particular, and disposes each emotion and idea in its labelled case. In this framework, supplied by the middle-age, he heaps up the whole, like a man of the Renaissance,—the literary description of passions and the medical description of madness, details of the hospital with a satire on human follies, physiological treatises side by side with personal confidences, the recipes of the apothecary with moral counsels, remarks on love with the history of evacuations. The discrimination of ideas has not yet been effected; doctor and poet, man of letters and savant, he is all at once; for want of dams, ideas pour like different liquids into the same vat, with strange spluttering and bubbling, with an unsavoury smell and odd effect. But the vat is full, and from this admixture are produced potent compounds which no preceding age has known.

## IV.

For in this mixture there is an effectual leaven, the poetic sentiment, which stirs up and animates the vast erudition, which will not be confined to dry catalogues ; which, interpreting every fact, every object, disentangles or divines a mysterious soul within it, and agitates the whole mind of man, by representing to him the restless world within and without him as a grand enigma. Let us conceive a kindred mind to Shakspeare's, a scholar and an observer instead of an actor and a poet, who in place of creating is occupied in comprehending, but who, like Shakspeare, applies himself to living things, penetrates their internal structure, puts himself in communication with their actual laws, imprints in himself fervently and scrupulously the smallest details of their outward appearance ; who at the same time extends his penetrating surmises beyond the region of observation, discerns behind visible phænomena some world obscure yet sublime, and trembles with a kind of veneration before the vast, indistinct, but peopled darkness on whose surface our little universe hangs quivering. Such a one is Sir Thomas Browne, a naturalist, a philosopher, a scholar, a physician, and a moralist, almost the last of the generation which produced Jeremy Taylor and Shakspeare. No thinker bears stronger witness to the wandering and inventive curiosity of the age. No writer has better displayed the brilliant and sombre imagination of the North. No one has spoken with a more eloquent emotion of death, the vast night of forgetfulness, of the all-devouring pit, of human vanity, which tries to create an ephemeral immortality out of glory or sculptured stones. No one has revealed, in



more glowing and original expressions, the poetic sap which flows through all the minds of the age.

"But the iniquity of oblivion blindly scattereth her poppy, and deals with the memory of men without distinction to merit of perpetuity. Who can but pity the founder of the pyramids? Herostratus lives that burnt the temple of Diana, he is almost lost that built it. Time hath spared the epitaph of Adrian's horse, confounded that of himself. In vain we compute our felicities by the advantage of our good names, since bad have equal duration; and Thersites is like to live as long as Agamemnon. Who knows whether the best of men be known, or whether there be not more remarkable persons forgot than any that stand remembered in the known account of time? Without the favour of the everlasting register, the first man had been as unknown as the last, and Methuselah's long life had been his only chronicle.

"Oblivion is not to be hired. The greater part must be content to be as though they had not been, to be found in the register of God, not in the record of man. Twenty-seven names make up the first story before the flood, and the recorded names ever since contain not one living century. The number of the dead long exceedeth all that shall live. The night of time far surpasseth the day, and who knows when was the equinox? Every hour adds unto the current arithmetick which scarce stands one moment. And since death must be the Lucina of life, and even Pagans could doubt, whether thus to live were to die; since our longest sun sets at right declensions, and makes but winter arches, and therefore it cannot be long before we lie down in darkness, and have our light in ashes; since the brother of death daily haunts us with dying mementos, and time, that grows old in itself, bids us hope no long duration;—diuturnity is a dream, and folly of expectation.

"Darkness and light divide the course of time, and oblivion shares with memory a great part even of our living beings; we slightly remember our felicities, and the smartest strokes of

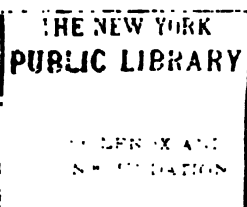
affliction leave but short smart upon us. Sense endureth no extremities, and sorrows destroy us or themselves. To weep into stones are fables. Afflictions induce callosities; miseries are slippery, or fall like snow upon us, which notwithstanding is no unhappy stupidity. To be ignorant of evils to come, and forgetful of evils past, is a merciful provision of nature, whereby we digest the mixture of our few and evil days; and our delivered senses not relapsing into cutting remembrances, our sorrows are not kept raw by the edge of repetitions. . . . All was vanity, feeding the wind, and folly. The Egyptian mummies, which Cambyzes or time hath spared, avarice now consumeth. Mummy is become merchandise, Mizraim cures wounds, and Pharaoh is sold for balsams. . . . Man is a noble animal, splendid in ashes, and pompous in the grave, solemnizing nativities and deaths with equal lustre, nor omitting ceremonies of bravery in the infancy of his nature . . . Pyramids, arches, obelisks, were but the irregularities of vain glory, and wild enormities of ancient magnanimity."<sup>1</sup>

These are almost the words of a poet, and it is just this poet's imagination which urges him onward into science.<sup>2</sup> Face to face with the productions of nature he abounds in conjectures, comparisons; he gropes about, proposing explanations, making trials, extending his guesses like so many flexible and vibrating feelers into the four corners of the globe, into the most distant regions of fancy and truth. As he looks upon the tree-like and foliaceous crusts which are formed upon the surface of freezing liquids, he asks himself if this be not a regeneration of vegetable essences, dissolved in the liquid. At the sight of curdling blood

<sup>1</sup> *The Works of Sir Thomas Browne*, ed. Wilkin, 1852, 3 vols. *Hydriotaphia*, iii. ch. v. 44, *et passim*.

<sup>2</sup> See Miland, *Etude sur Sir Thomas Browne*, *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 1858.

or milk, he inquires whether there be not something analogous to the formation of the bird in the egg, or to that coagulation of chaos which gave birth to our world. In presence of that impalpable force which makes liquids freeze, he asks if apoplexy and cataract are not the effects of a like power, and do not indicate also the presence of a congealing agency. He is in presence of nature as an artist, a man of letters in presence of a living countenance, marking every feature, every movement of physiognomy, so as to be able to divine the passions and the inner disposition, ceaselessly correcting and undoing his interpretations, kept in agitation by thought of the invisible forces which operate beneath the visible envelope. The whole of the middle-age and of antiquity, with their theories and imaginations, Platonism, Cabalism, Christian theology, Aristotle's substantial forms, the specific forms of the alchemists,—all human speculations, entangled and transformed one within the other, meet simultaneously in his brain, so as to open up to him vistas of this unknown world. The accumulation, the pile, the confusion, the fermentation and the inner swarming, mingled with vapours and flashes, the tumultuous overloading of his imagination and his mind, oppress and agitate him. In this expectation and emotion his curiosity takes hold of everything; in reference to the least fact, the most special, the most obsolete, the most chimerical, he conceives a chain of complicated investigations, calculating how the ark could contain all creatures, with their provision of food; how Perpenna, at a banquet, arranged the guests so as to strike Sertorius; what trees must have grown on the banks of Acheron, supposing that there were any; whether quincunx plantations had not





*SIR THOMAS BROWNE*



their origin in Eden, and whether the numbers and geometrical figures contained in the lozenge-form are not met with in all the productions of nature and art. You may recognise here the exuberance and the strange caprices of an inner development too ample and too strong. Archæology, chemistry, history, nature, there is nothing in which he is not passionately interested, which does not cause his memory and his inventive powers to overflow, which does not summon up within him the idea of some force, certainly admirable, possibly infinite. But what completes his picture, what signalises the advance of science, is the fact that his imagination provides a counterbalance against itself. He is as fertile in doubts as he is in explanations. If he sees a thousand reasons which tend to one view, he sees also a thousand which tend to the contrary. At the two extremities of the same fact, he raises up to the clouds, but in equal piles, the scaffolding of contradictory arguments. Having made a guess, he knows that it is but a guess; he pauses, ends with a perhaps, recommends verification. His writings consist only of opinions, given as such; even his principal work is a refutation of popular errors. In the main, he proposes questions, suggests explanations, suspends his judgments, nothing more; but this is enough: when the search is so eager, when the paths in which it proceeds are so numerous, when it is so scrupulous in securing its hold, the issue of the pursuit is sure; we are but a few steps from the truth.

#### V.

In this band of scholars, dreamers, and inquirers, appears the most comprehensive, sensible, originative of the



minds of the age, Francis Bacon, a great and luminous intellect, one of the finest of this poetic progeny, who, like his predecessors, was naturally disposed to clothe his ideas in the most splendid dress: in this age, a thought did not seem complete until it had assumed form and colour. But what distinguishes him from the others is, that with him an image only serves to concentrate meditation. He reflected long, stamped on his mind all the parts and relations of his subject; he is master of it, and then, instead of exposing this complete idea in a graduated chain of reasoning, he embodies it in a comparison so expressive, exact, lucid, that behind the figure we perceive all the details of the idea, like liquor in a fine crystal vase. Judge of his style by a single example:

“For as water, whether it be the dew of Heaven or the springs of the earth, easily scatters and loses itself in the ground, except it be collected into some receptacle, where it may by union and consort comfort and sustain itself (and for that cause, the industry of man has devised aqueducts, cisterns, and pools, and likewise beautified them with various ornaments of magnificence and state, as well as for use and necessity); so this excellent liquor of knowledge, whether it descend from divine inspiration or spring from human sense, would soon perish and vanish into oblivion, if it were not preserved in books, traditions, conferences, and especially in places appointed for such matters as universities, colleges, and schools, where it may have both a fixed habitation, and means and opportunity of increasing and collecting itself.”<sup>1</sup>

“The greatest error of all the rest, is the mistaking or misplacing of the last or farthest end of knowledge: for men have entered into a desire of learning and knowledge, sometimes upon a natural curiosity and inquisitive appetite; sometimes to

<sup>1</sup> Bacon's *Works*. Translation of the *De Augmentis Scientiarum*, Book ii.; To the King.

entertain their minds with variety and delight ; sometimes for ornament and reputation ; and sometimes to enable them to victory of wit and contradiction ; and most times for lucre and profession ; and seldom sincerely to give a true account of their gift of reason, to the benefit and use of men : as if there were sought in knowledge a couch whereupon to rest a searching and restless spirit ; or a terrace, for a wandering and variable mind to walk up and down with a fair prospect ; or a tower of state, for a proud mind to raise itself upon ; or a fort or commanding ground, for strife and contention ; or a shop, for profit or sale ; and not a rich storehouse, for the glory of the Creator, and the relief of man's estate."<sup>1</sup>

This is his mode of thought, by symbols, not by analysis ; instead of explaining his idea, he transposes and translates it,—translates it entire, to the smallest details, enclosing all in the majesty of a grand period, or in the brevity of a striking sentence. Thence springs a style of admirable richness, gravity, and vigour, now solemn and symmetrical, now concise and piercing, always elaborate and full of colour.<sup>2</sup> There is nothing in English prose superior to his diction.

Thence is derived also his manner of conceiving things. He is not a dialectician, like Hobbes or Descartes, apt in arranging ideas, in educing one from another, in leading his reader from the simple to the complex by an unbroken chain. He is a producer of conceptions and of sentences. The matter being explored, he says to us : "Such it is ; touch it not on that side ; it must be approached from the other." Nothing more ; no proof, no effort to convince : he affirms, and does nothing more ;

<sup>1</sup> Bacon's *Works*. Translation of the *De Augmentis Scientiarum*, Book i. The true end of learning mistaken.

<sup>2</sup> Especially in the *Essays*.

he has thought in the manner of artists and poets, and he speaks after the manner of prophets and seers. *Cogitata et visa* this title of one of his books might be the title of all. The most admirable, the *Novum Organum*, is a string of aphorisms,—a collection, as it were, of scientific decrees, as of an oracle who foresees the future and reveals the truth. And to make the resemblance complete, he expresses them by poetical figures, by enigmatic abbreviations, almost in Sibylline verses: *Idola specûs*, *Idola tribûs*, *Idola fori*, *Idola theatri*, every one will recall these strange names, by which he signifies the four kinds of illusions to which man is subject.<sup>1</sup> Shakspeare and the seers do not contain more vigorous or expressive condensations of thought, more resembling inspiration, and in Bacon they are to be found everywhere. On the whole, his process is that of the creators; it is intuition, not reasoning. When he has laid up his store of facts, the greatest possible, on some vast subject, on some entire province of the mind, on the whole anterior philosophy, on the general condition of the sciences, on the power and limits of human reason, he casts over all this a comprehensive view, as it were a great net, brings up a universal idea, condenses his idea into a maxim, and hands it to us with the words, "Verify and profit by it."

There is nothing more hazardous, more like fantasy, than this mode of thought, when it is not checked by natural and strong good sense. This common sense, which is a kind of natural divination, the stable equilibrium of an intellect always gravitating to the true,

<sup>1</sup> See also *Novum Organum*, Books i. and ii.; the twenty-seven kinds of examples, with their metaphorical names: *Instantiæ crucis*, *divortii januæ*, *Instantiæ innuentes*, *polychrestæ*, *magicæ*, etc.

like the needle to the pole, Bacon possesses in the highest degree. He has a pre-eminently practical, even an utilitarian mind, such as we meet with later in Bentham, and such as their business habits were to impress more and more upon the English. At the age of sixteen, while at the university, he was dissatisfied with Aristotle's philosophy,<sup>1</sup> not that he thought meanly of the author, whom, on the contrary, he calls a great genius; but because it seemed to him of no practical utility, incapable of producing works which might promote the well-being of men. We see that from the outset he struck upon his dominant idea: all else comes to him from this; a contempt for antecedent philosophy, the conception of a different system, the entire reformation of the sciences by the indication of a new goal, the definition of a distinct method, the opening up of unsuspected anticipations.<sup>2</sup> It is never speculation which he relishes, but the practical application of it. His eyes are turned not to heaven, but to earth, not to things abstract and vain, but to things palpable and solid, not to curious but to profitable truths. He seeks to better the condition of men, to labour for the welfare of mankind, to enrich human life with new discoveries and new resources, to equip mankind with new powers and new instruments of action. His philosophy itself is but an instrument, *organum*, a sort of machine or lever constructed to enable the intellect to raise a weight, to break through obstacles, to open up vistas, to accomplish tasks which had hitherto surpassed its power.

<sup>1</sup> *The Works of Francis Bacon*, London 1824, vol. vii. p. 2. *Latin Biography* by Rawley.

<sup>2</sup> This point is brought out by the review of Lord Macaulay. *Critical and Historical Essays*, vol. iii.

In his eyes, every special science, like science in general, should be an implement. He invites mathematicians, to quit their pure geometry, to study numbers only with a view to natural philosophy, to seek formulas only to calculate real quantities and natural motions. He recommends moralists to study the soul, the passions, habits, temptations, not merely in a speculative way, but with a view to the cure or diminution of vice, and assigns to the science of morals as its goal the amelioration of morals. For him, the object of science is always the establishment of an art, that is, the production of something of practical utility; when he wished to describe the efficacious nature of his philosophy by a tale, he delineated in the *New Atlantis*, with a poet's boldness and the precision of a seer, almost employing the very terms in use now, modern applications, and the present organisation of the sciences, academies, observatories, air-balloons, submarine vessels, the improvement of land, the transmutation of species, regenerations, the discovery of remedies, the preservation of food. The end of our foundation, says his principal personage, is the knowledge of causes and secret motions of things, and the enlarging of the bounds of human empire, to the effecting of all things possible. And this "possible" is infinite.

How did this grand and just conception originate? Doubtless common sense and genius too were necessary to its production; but neither common sense nor genius was lacking to men: there had been more than one who, observing, like Bacon, the progress of particular industries, could, like him, have conceived of universal industry, and from certain limited ameliorations have advanced to unlimited amelioration. Here we see the

power of connection ; men think they do everything by their individual thought, and they can do nothing without the assistance of the thoughts of their neighbours ; they fancy that they are following the small voice within them, but they only hear it because it is swelled by the thousand buzzing and imperious voices, which, issuing from all surrounding or distant circumstances, are confounded with it in an harmonious vibration. Generally they hear it, as Bacon did, from the first moment of reflection ; but it had become inaudible among the opposing sounds which came from without to smother it. Could this confidence in the infinite enlargement of human power, this glorious idea of the universal conquest of nature, this firm hope in the continual increase of well-being and happiness, have germinated, grown, occupied an intelligence entirely, and thence have struck its roots, been propagated and spread over neighbouring intelligences, in a time of discouragement and decay, when men believed the end of the world at hand, when things were falling into ruin about them, when Christian mysticism, as in the first centuries, ecclesiastical tyranny, as in the fourteenth century, were convincing them of their impotence, by perverting their intellectual efforts and curtailing their liberty. On the contrary, such hopes must then have seemed to be outbursts of pride, or suggestions of the carnal mind. They did seem so ; and the last representatives of ancient science, and the first of the new, were exiled or imprisoned, assassinated or burned. In order to be developed an idea must be in harmony with surrounding civilisation ; before man can expect to attain the dominion over nature, or attempts to improve his condition, amelioration must have begun on all sides, industries

have increased, knowledge have been accumulated, the arts expanded, a hundred thousand irrefutable witnesses must have come incessantly to give proof of his power and assurance of his progress. The "masculine birth of the time" (*temporis partus masculus*) is the title which Bacon applies to his work, and it is a true one. In fact, the whole age co-operated in it; by this creation it was finished. The consciousness of human power and prosperity gave to the Renaissance its first energy, its ideal, its poetic materials, its distinguishing features; and now it furnishes it with its final expression, its scientific doctrine, and its ultimate object.

We may add also, its method. For, the end of a journey once determined, the route is laid down, since the end always determines the route; when the point to be reached is changed, the path of approach is changed, and science, varying its object, varies also its method. So long as it limited its effort to the satisfying an idle curiosity, opening out speculative vistas, establishing a sort of opera in speculative minds, it could launch out any moment into metaphysical abstractions and distinctions: it was enough for it to skim over experience; it soon quitted it, and came all at once upon great words, quiddities, the principle of individuation, final causes. Half proofs sufficed science; at bottom it did not care to establish a truth, but to get an opinion; and its instrument, the syllogism, was serviceable only for refutations, not for discoveries: it took general laws for a starting-point instead of a point of arrival; instead of going to find them, it fancied them found. The syllogism was good in the schools, not in nature; it made disputants, not discoverers. From the moment that science had art for an end, and men studied in

order to act, all was transformed; for we cannot act, without certain and precise knowledge. Forces, before they can be employed, must be measured and verified; before we can build a house, we must know exactly the resistance of the beams, or the house will collapse; before we can cure a sick man, we must know with certainty the effect of a remedy, or the patient will die. Practice makes certainty and exactitude a necessity to science, because practice is impossible when it has nothing to lean upon but guesses and approximations. How can we eliminate guesses and approximations? How introduce into science solidity and precision? We must imitate the cases in which science, issuing in practice, has proved to be precise and certain, and these cases are the industries. We must, as in the industries, observe, essay, grope about, verify, keep our mind fixed on sensible and particular things, advance to general rules only step by step; not anticipate experience, but follow it; not imagine nature, but interpret it. For every general effect, such as heat, whiteness, hardness, liquidity, we must seek a general condition, so that in producing the condition we may produce the effect. And for this it is necessary, by fit rejections and exclusions, to extract the condition sought from the heap of facts in which it lies buried, construct the table of cases from which the effect is absent, the table where it is present, the table where the effect is shown in various degrees, so as to isolate and bring to light the condition which produced it.<sup>1</sup> Then we shall have, not useless universal axioms, but efficacious mediate axioms, true laws from which we can derive works, and which are the sources of power in the same degree as the sources

<sup>1</sup> *Novum Organum*, ii. 15 and 16.



of light.<sup>1</sup> Bacon described and predicted in this modern science and industry, their correspondence, method, resources, principle; and after more than two centuries, it is still to him that we go even at the present day to look for the theory of what we are attempting and doing.

Beyond this great view, he has discovered nothing. Cowley, one of his admirers, rightly said that, like Moses on Mount Pisgah, he was the first to announce the promised land; but he might have added quite as justly, that, like Moses, he did not enter there. He pointed out the route, but did not travel it; he taught men how to discover natural laws, but discovered none. His definition of heat is extremely imperfect. His *Natural History* is full of fanciful explanations.<sup>2</sup> Like the poets, he peoples nature with instincts and desires; attributes to bodies an actual voracity, to the atmosphere a thirst for light, sounds, odours, vapours, which it drinks in; to metals a sort of haste to be incorporated with acids. He explains the duration of the bubbles of air which float on the surface of liquids, by supposing that air has a very small or no appetite for height. He sees in every quality, weight, ductility, hardness, a distinct essence which has its special cause; so that when a man knows the cause of every quality of gold, he will be able to put all these causes together, and make gold. In the main, with the alchemists, Paracelsus and Gilbert, Kepler himself, with all the men of his time, men of imagination, nourished on Aristotle, he represents nature as a compound of secret and living energies, inexplicable and primordial forces, distinct and indecom-

<sup>1</sup> *Novum Organum*, i. i. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Natural History*, 800, 24, etc. *De Augmentis*, iii. 1.

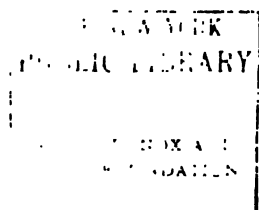
possible essences, adapted each by the will of the Creator to produce a distinct effect. He almost saw souls endowed with latent repugnances and occult inclinations, which aspire to or resist certain directions, certain mixtures, and certain localities. On this account also he confounds everything in his researches in an undistinguishable mass, vegetative and medicinal properties, mechanical and curative, physical and moral, without considering the most complex as depending on the simplest, but each on the contrary in itself, and taken apart, as an irreducible and independent existence. Obstinate in this error, the thinkers of the age mark time without advancing. They see clearly with Bacon the wide field of discovery, but they cannot enter upon it. They want an idea, and for want of this idea they do not advance. The disposition of mind which but now was a lever, is become an obstacle: it must be changed, that the obstacle may be got rid of. For ideas, I mean great and efficacious ones, do not come at will nor by chance, by the effort of an individual, or by a happy accident. Methods and philosophies, as well as literatures and religions, arise from the spirit of the age; and this spirit of the age makes them potent or powerless. One state of public intelligence excludes a certain kind of literature; another, a certain scientific conception. When it happens thus, writers and thinkers labour in vain, the literature is abortive, the conception does not make its appearance. In vain they turn one way and another, trying to remove the weight which hinders them; something stronger than themselves paralyses their hands and frustrates their endeavours. The central pivot of the vast wheel on which human affairs move must be displaced one notch, that all may

move with its motion. At this moment the pivot was moved, and thus a revolution of the great wheel begins, bringing round a new conception of nature, and in consequence that part of the method which was lacking. To the diviners, the creators, the comprehensive and impassioned minds who seized objects in a lump and in masses, succeeded the discursive thinkers, the systematic thinkers, the graduated and clear logicians, who, disposing ideas in continuous series, lead the hearer gradually from the simple to the most complex by easy and unbroken paths. Descartes superseded Bacon; the classical age obliterated the Renaissance; poetry and lofty imagination gave way before rhetoric, eloquence, and analysis. In this transformation of mind, ideas were transformed. Everything was drained dry and simplified. The universe, like all else, was reduced to two or three notions; and the conception of nature, which was poetical, became mechanical. Instead of souls, living forces, repugnances, and attractions, we have pulleys, levers, impelling forces. The world, which seemed a mass of instinctive powers, is now like a mere machinery of cog-wheels. Beneath this adventurous supposition lies a large and certain truth: that there is, namely, a scale of facts, some at the summit very complex, others at the base very simple; those above having their origin in those below, so that the lower ones explain the higher; and that we must seek the primary laws of things in the laws of motion. The search was made, and Galileo found them. Thenceforth the work of the Renaissance, outstripping the extreme point to which Bacon had pushed it, and at which he had left it, was able to proceed onward by itself, and did so proceed, without limit.



*LORD FRANCIS BACON*





## CHAPTER II.

*The Theatre.*

WE must look at this world more closely, and beneath the ideas which are developed seek for the living men; it is the theatre especially which is the original product of the English Renaissance, and it is the theatre especially which will exhibit the men of the English Renaissance. Forty poets, amongst them ten of superior rank, as well as one, the greatest of all artists who have represented the soul in words; many hundreds of pieces, and nearly fifty masterpieces; the drama extended over all the provinces of history, imagination, and fancy,—expanded so as to embrace comedy, tragedy, pastoral and fanciful literature—to represent all degrees of human condition, and all the caprices of human invention—to express all the perceptible details of actual truth, and all the philosophic grandeur of general reflection; the stage disencumbered of all precept and freed from all imitation, given up and appropriated in the minutest particulars to the reigning taste and public intelligence: all this was a vast and manifold work, capable by its flexibility, its greatness, and its form, of receiving and preserving the exact imprint of the age and of the nation.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “The very age and body of the time, his form and pressure.”—*Shakspeare*.



## I.

Let us try, then, to set before our eyes this public, this audience, and this stage—all connected with one another, as in every natural and living work; and if ever there was a living and natural work, it is here. There were already seven theatres in London, in Shakspeare's time, so brisk and universal was the taste for dramatic representations. Great and rude contrivances, awkward in their construction, barbarous in their appointments; but a fervid imagination readily supplied all that they lacked, and hardy bodies endured all inconveniences without difficulty. On a dirty site, on the banks of the Thames, rose the principal theatre, the Globe, a sort of hexagonal tower, surrounded by a muddy ditch, on which was hoisted a red flag. The common people could enter as well as the rich: there were sixpenny, twopenny, even penny seats; but they could not see it without money. If it rained, and it often rains in London, the people in the pit, butchers, mercers, bakers, sailors, apprentices, receive the streaming rain upon their heads. I suppose they did not trouble themselves about it; it was not so long since they began to pave the streets of London; and when men, like these, have had experience of sewers and puddles, they are not afraid of catching cold. While waiting for the piece, they amuse themselves after their fashion, drink beer, crack nuts, eat fruit, howl, and now and then resort to their fists; they have been known to fall upon the actors, and turn the theatre upside down. At other times they were dissatisfied and went to the tavern to give the poet a hiding, or toss him in a blanket; they were coarse fellows, and there was no month

when the cry of "Clubs" did not call them out of their shops to exercise their brawny arms. When the beer took effect, there was a great upturned barrel in the pit, a peculiar receptacle for general use. The smell rises, and then comes the cry, "Burn the juniper!" They burn some in a plate on the stage, and the heavy smoke fills the air. Certainly the folk there assembled could scarcely get disgusted at anything, and cannot have had sensitive noses. In the time of Rabelais there was not much cleanliness to speak of. Remember that they were hardly out of the middle-age, and that in the middle-age man lived on a dunghill.

Above them, on the stage, were the spectators able to pay a shilling, the elegant people, the gentlefolk. These were sheltered from the rain, and if they chose to pay an extra shilling, could have a stool. To this were reduced the prerogatives of rank and the devices of comfort: it often happened that there were not stools enough; then they lie down on the ground: this was not a time to be dainty. They play cards, smoke, insult the pit, who gave it them back without stinting, and throw apples at them into the bargain. They also gesticulate, swear in Italian, French, English;<sup>1</sup> crack aloud jokes in dainty, composite, high-coloured, words: in short, they have the energetic, original, gay manners of artists, the same humour, the same absence of constraint, and, to complete the resemblance, the same desire to make themselves singular, the same imaginative cravings, the same absurd and picturesque devices, beards cut to a point, into the shape of a fan, a spade, the letter T, gaudy and expensive dresses, copied from five or six neighbouring nations, embroidered, laced

<sup>1</sup> Ben Jonson, *Every Man in his Humour*; *Cynthia's Revels*.

with gold, motley, continually heightened in effect, or changed for others: there was, as it were, a carnival in their brains as well as on their backs.

With such spectators illusions could be produced without much trouble: there were no preparations or perspectives; few or no moveable scenes: their imaginations took all this upon them. A scroll in big letters announced to the public that they were in London or Constantinople; and that was enough to carry the public to the desired place. There was no trouble about probability. Sir Philip Sidney writes:

“ You shall have Asia of the one side, and Africke of the other, and so many other under-kingdomes, that the Plaier when hee comes in, must ever begin with telling where hee is, or else the tale will not be conceived. Now shall you have three Ladies walke to gather flowers, and then wee must beleewe the stage to be a garden. By and by wee heare newes of shipwracks in the same place, then wee are to blame if we accept it not for a rocke; . . . while in the meane time two armies flie in, represented with foure swordes and bucklers, and then what hard heart will not receive it for a pitched field? Now of time they are much more liberall. For ordinary it is, that two young Princes fall in love, after many traverses, shee is got with childe, delivered of a faire boy, hee is lost, groweth a man, falleth in love, and is readie to get another childe; and all this in two houres space.”<sup>1</sup>

Doubtless these enormities were somewhat reduced under Shakspeare; with a few hangings, crude representations of animals, towers, forests, they assisted somewhat the public imagination. But after all, in Shakspeare's plays as in all others, the imagination from within is chiefly drawn upon for the machinery;

<sup>1</sup> *The Defence of Poesie*, ed. 1629, p. 562.

it must lend itself to all, substitute all, accept for a queen a young man who has just been shaved, endure in one act ten changes of place, leap suddenly over twenty years or five hundred miles,<sup>1</sup> take half-a dozen supernumeraries for forty thousand men, and to have represented by the rolling of the drums all the battles of Cæsar, Henry V., Coriolanus, Richard III. And imagination, being so overflowing and so young, accepts all this! Recall your own youth; for my part, the deepest emotions I have ever felt at a theatre were given to me by a strolling bevy of four young girls, playing comedy and tragedy on a stage in a coffeehouse; true, I was eleven years old. So in this theatre, at this moment, their souls were fresh, as ready to feel everything as the poet was to dare everything.

## II.

These are but externals; let us try to advance further, to observe the passions, the bent of mind, the inner man: it is this inner state which raised and modelled the drama, as everything else; invisible inclinations are everywhere the cause of visible works, and the interior shapes the exterior. What are these townspeople, courtiers, this public, whose taste fashions the theatre? what is there peculiar in the structure and condition of their minds? The condition must needs be peculiar; for the drama flourishes all of a sudden, and for sixty years together, with marvellous luxuriance, and at the end of this time is arrested so that no effort could ever revive it. The structure must be peculiar; for of all theatres, old and new, this is distinct in form, and displays a style, action, characters, an idea of life, which are not found in any age or any country beside

<sup>1</sup> *Winter's Tale*; *Cymbeline*; *Julius Cæsar*.

This particular feature is the free and complete expansion of nature.

What we call nature in men is, man such as he was before culture and civilisation had deformed and reformed him. Almost always, when a new generation arrives at manhood and consciousness, it finds a code of precepts impose on it with all the weight and authority of antiquity. A hundred kinds of chains, a hundred thousand kinds of ties, religion, morality, good breeding, every legislation which regulates sentiments, morals, manners, fetter and tame the creature of impulse and passion which breathes and frets within each of us. There is nothing like that here. It is a regeneration, and the curb of the past is wanting to the present Catholicism, reduced to external ceremony and clerical chicanery, had just ended; Protestantism, arrested in its first gropings after truth, or straying into sects, had not yet gained the mastery; the religion of discipline was grown feeble, and the religion of morals was not yet established; men ceased to listen to the directions of the clergy, and had not yet spelt out the law of conscience. The church was turned into an assembly-room, as in Italy; the young fellows came to St. Paul's to walk, laugh, chatter, display their new cloaks; the thing had even passed into a custom. They paid for the noise they made with their spurs, and this tax was a source of income to the canons;<sup>1</sup> pickpockets, loose

<sup>1</sup> Strype, in his *Annals of the Reformation* (1571), says: "Many now were wholly departed from the communion of the church, and came no more to hear divine service in their parish churches, nor received the holy sacrament, according to the laws of the realm." Richard Baxter, in his *Life*, published in 1696, says: "We lived in a country that had but little preaching at all. . . . In the village where I lived the Reader read the Common Prayer briefly; and the

girls, came there by crowds; these latter struck their bargains while service was going on. Imagine, in short, that the scruples of conscience and the severity of the Puritans were at that time odious and ridiculed on the stage, and judge of the difference between this sensual, unbridled England, and the correct, disciplined, stiff England of our own time. Ecclesiastical or secular, we find no signs of rule. In the failure of faith, reason had not gained sway, and opinion is as void of authority as tradition. The imbecile age, which has just ended, continues buried in scorn, with its ravings, its verse-makers, and its pedantic text-books; and out of the liberal opinions derived from antiquity, from Italy, France, and Spain, every one could pick and choose as it pleased him, without stooping to restraint or acknowledging a superiority. There was no model imposed on them, as nowadays; instead of affecting imitation, they affected originality.<sup>1</sup> Each strove to be himself, with his own oaths, peculiar ways, costumes, his specialties of conduct and humour, and to be unlike every one else. They said not, "So and so is done," but "I do so and so." Instead of restraining they gave free vent to themselves. There was no etiquette of society; save for an exaggerated jargon of chivalresque courtesy, they are masters of speech and action on the impulse of the moment. You will find them free from decorum, as of all else.

rest of the day, even till dark night almost, except Eating time, was spent in Dancing under a Maypole and a great tree, not far from my father's door, where all the Town did meet together. And though one of my father's own Tenants was the piper, he could not restrain him nor break the sport. So that we could not read the Scripture in our family without the great disturbance of the Taber and Pipe and noise in the street."

<sup>1</sup> Ben Jonson, *Every Man in his Humour*.

In this outbreak and absence of fetters, they resemble fine strong horses let loose in the meadow. Their in-born instincts have not been tamed, nor muzzled, nor diminished.

On the contrary, they have been preserved intact by bodily and military training; and escaping as they were from barbarism, not from civilisation, they had not been acted upon by the innate softening and hereditary tempering which are now transmitted with the blood, and civilise a man from the moment of his birth. This is why man, who for three centuries has been a domestic animal, was still almost a savage beast, and the force of his muscles and the strength of his nerves increased the boldness and energy of his passions. Look at these uncultivated men, men of the people, how suddenly the blood warms and rises to their face; their fists double, their lips press together, and those vigorous bodies rush at once into action. The courtiers of that age were like our men of the people. They had the same taste for the exercise of their limbs, the same indifference toward the inclemencies of the weather, the same coarseness of language, the same undisguised sensuality. They were carmen in body and gentlemen in sentiment, with the dress of actors and the tastes of artists. "At fourtene," says John Hardyng, "a lordes sonnes shalle to felde hunte the dere, and catch an hardynesse. For dere to hunte and slea, and see them blede, ane hardyment gyffith to his courage. . . . At sextene yere, to werray and to wage, to juste and ryde, and castels to assayle . . . and every day his armure to assay in fete of armes with some of his meyne."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Chronicle of John Hardyng* (1436), ed. H. Ellis, 1812. Preface.

When ripened to manhood, he is employed with the bow, in wrestling, leaping, vaulting. Henry VIII.'s court, in its noisy merriment, was like a village fair. The king, says Holinshed, exercised himself "dailie in shooting, singing, dancing, wrestling, casting of the barre, plaieing at the recorders, flute, virginals, in setting of songs, and making of ballads." He leaps the moats with a pole, and was once within an ace of being killed. He is so fond of wrestling, that publicly, on the field of the Cloth of Gold, he seized Francis I. in his arms to try a throw with him. This is how a common soldier or a bricklayer nowadays tries a new comrade. In fact, they regarded gross jests and brutal buffooneries as amusements, as soldiers and bricklayers do now. In every nobleman's house there was a fool, whose business it was to utter pointed jests, to make eccentric gestures, horrible faces, to sing licentious songs, as we might hear now in a beer-house. They thought insults and obscenity a joke. They were foul-mouthed, they listened to Rabelais' words undiluted, and delighted in conversation which would revolt us. They had no respect for humanity; the rules of proprieties and the habits of good breeding began only under Louis XIV., and by imitation of the French; at this time they all blurted out the word that fitted in, and that was most frequently a coarse word. You will see on the stage, in Shakspeare's *Pericles*, the filth of a haunt of vice.<sup>1</sup> The great lords, the well-dressed ladies, speak Billingsgate. When Henry V. pays his court to Catherine of France, it is with the coarse bearing of a sailor who may have taken a fancy to a sutler; and like the tars who tattoo a

<sup>1</sup> Act iv. 2 and 4. See also the character of Calypso in Massinger; Putana in Ford; Protalyce in Beaumont and Fletcher.



heart on their arms to prove their love for the girls they left behind them, there were men who "devoured sulphur and drank urine"<sup>1</sup> to win their mistress by a proof of affection. Humanity is as much lacking as decency.<sup>2</sup> Blood, suffering, does not move them. The court frequents bear and bull baitings, where dogs are ripped up and chained beasts are sometimes beaten to death, and it was, says an officer of the palace, "a charming entertainment."<sup>3</sup> No wonder they used their arms like clodhoppers and gossips. Elizabeth used to beat her maids of honour, "so that these beautiful girls could often be heard crying and lamenting in a piteous manner." One day she spat upon Sir Mathew's fringed coat; at another time, when Essex, whom she was scolding, turned his back, she gave him a box on the ear. It was then the practice of great ladies to beat their children and their servants. Poor Jane Grey was sometimes so wretchedly "boxed, struck, pinched, and

<sup>1</sup> Middleton, *Dutch Courtesan*.

<sup>2</sup> Commission given by Henry VIII. to the Earl of Hertford, 1544 : "You are there to put all to fire and sword ; to burn Edinburgh town, and to raze and deface it, when you have sacked it, and gotten what you can out of it. . . . Do what you can out of hand, and without long tarrying, to beat down and overthrow the castle, sack Holyrood-House, and as many towns and villages about Edinburgh as ye conveniently can ; sack Leith, and burn and subvert it, and all the rest, putting man, woman, and child to fire and sword, without exception, when any resistance shall be made against you ; and this done, pass over to the Fife land, and extend like extremities and destructions in all towns and villages whereunto ye may reach conveniently, not forgetting amongst all the rest, so to spoil and turn upside down the cardinal's town of St. Andrew's, as the upper stone may be the nether, and not one stick stand by another, sparing no creature alive within the same, specially such as either in friendship or blood be allied to the cardinal. This journey shall succeed most to his majesty's honour."

<sup>3</sup> Laneham, *A Goodly Relief*.

ill-treated in other manners which she dare not relate," that she used to wish herself dead. Their first idea is to come to words, to blows, to have satisfaction. As in feudal times, they appeal at once to arms, and retain the habit of taking the law in their own hands, and without delay. "On Thursday laste," writes Gilbert Talbot to the Earl and Countess of Shrewsbury, "as my Lorde Rytche was rydyng in the streates, there was one Wyndam that stode in a dore, and shotte a dagge at him, thynkyng to have slayne him. . . . The same daye, also, as Sr John Conway was goyng in the streetes, M<sup>r</sup>. Lodovyke Grevell came sodenly upon him, and stroke him on the hedd w<sup>th</sup> a sworde. . . . I am forced to trouble yo<sup>r</sup> Honors w<sup>th</sup> thes tryflyng matters, for I know no greater."<sup>1</sup> No one, not even the queen, is safe among these violent dispositions.<sup>2</sup> Again, when one man struck another in the precincts of the court, his hand was cut off, and the arteries stopped with a red-hot iron. Only such atrocious imitations of their own crimes, and the painful image of bleeding and suffering flesh, could tame their vehemence and restrain the uprising of their instincts. Judge now what materials they furnish to the theatre, and what characters they look for at the theatre. To please the public, the stage cannot deal too much in open lust and the strongest passions; it must depict man attaining the limit of his desires, unchecked, almost mad, now trembling and rooted before the white palpitating flesh which his eyes devour, now haggard and grinding his teeth before the

<sup>1</sup> 13th February 1587. Nathan Drake, *Shakspeare and his Times*, ii. p. 165. See also the same work for all these details.

<sup>2</sup> Essex, when struck by the queen, put his hand on the hilt of his sword.

enemy whom he wishes to tear to pieces, now carried beyond himself and overwhelmed at the sight of the honours and wealth which he covets, always raging and enveloped in a tempest of eddying ideas, sometimes shaken by impetuous joy, more often on the verge of fury and madness, stronger, more ardent, more daringly let loose to infringe on reason and law than ever. We hear from the stage as from the history of the time, these fierce murmurs : the sixteenth century is like a den of lions.

Amid passions so strong as these there is not one lacking. Nature appears here in all its violence, but also in all its fulness. If nothing had been weakened, nothing had been mutilated. It is the entire man who is displayed, heart, mind, body, senses, with his noblest and finest aspirations, as with his most bestial and savage appetites, without the preponderance of any dominant circumstance to cast him altogether in one direction, to exalt or degrade him. He has not become rigid, as he will be under Puritanism. He is not uncrowned as in the Restoration. After the hollowness and weariness of the fifteenth century, he rose up by a second birth, as before in Greece man had risen by a first birth ; and now, as then, the temptations of the outer world came combined to raise his faculties from their sloth and torpor. A sort of generous warmth spread over them to ripen and make them flourish. Peace, prosperity, comfort began ; new industries and increasing activity suddenly multiplied objects of utility and luxury tenfold. America and India, by their discovery, caused the treasures and prodigies heaped up afar over distant seas to shine before their eyes ; antiquity re-discovered, sciences mapped out, the Reformation begun, books

multiplied by printing, ideas by books, doubled the means of enjoyment, imagination, and thought. People wanted to enjoy, to imagine, and to think; for the desire grows with the attraction, and here all attractions were combined. There were attractions for the senses, in the chambers which they began to warm, in the beds newly furnished with pillows, in the coaches which they began to use for the first time. There were attractions for the imagination in the new palaces, arranged after the Italian manner; in the variegated hangings from Flanders; in the rich garments, gold-embroidered, which, being continually changed, combined the fancies and the splendours of all Europe. There were attractions for the mind, in the noble and beautiful writings which, spread abroad, translated, explained, brought in philosophy, eloquence, and poetry, from restored antiquity, and from the surrounding Renaissances. Under this appeal all aptitudes and instincts at once started up; the low and the lofty, ideal and sensual love, gross cupidity and pure generosity. Recall what you yourself experienced, when from being a child you became a man: what wishes for happiness, what breadth of anticipation, what intoxication of heart wafted you towards all joys; with what impulse your hands seized involuntarily and all at once every branch of the tree, and would not let a single fruit escape. At sixteen years, like Chérubin,<sup>1</sup> we wish for a servant girl while we adore a Madonna; we are capable of every species of covetousness, and also of every species of self-denial; we find virtue more lovely, our meals more enjoyable; pleasure has more zest, heroism more worth; there is no allurements which is not keen; the sweet-

<sup>1</sup> A page in the *Mariage de Figaro*, a comedy by Beaumarchais.—*Tr.*

ness and novelty of things are too strong; and in the hive of passions which buzzes within us, and stings us like the sting of a bee, we can do nothing but plunge, one after another, in all directions. Such were the men of this time, Raleigh, Essex, Elizabeth, Henry VIII. himself, excessive and inconstant, ready for devotion and for crime, violent in good and evil, heroic with strange weaknesses, humble with sudden changes of mood, never vile with premeditation like the roysterers of the Restoration, never rigid on principle like the Puritans of the Revolution, capable of weeping like children,<sup>1</sup> and of dying like men, often base courtiers, more than once true knights, displaying constantly, amidst all these contradictions of bearing, only the fulness of their characters. Thus prepared, they could take in everything, sanguinary ferocity and refined generosity, the brutality of shameless debauchery, and the most divine innocence of love, accept all the characters, prostitutes and virgins, princes and mountebanks, pass quickly from trivial buffoonery to lyrical sublimities, listen alternately to the quibbles of clowns and the songs of lovers. The drama even, in order to imitate and satisfy the fertility of their nature, must talk all tongues, pompous, inflated verse, loaded with imagery, and side by side with this, vulgar prose: more, it must distort its natural style and limits; put songs, poetical devices, into the discourse of courtiers and the speeches of statesmen; bring on the stage the fairy world of the opera, as Middleton says, gnomes, nymphs of the land and sea, with their groves and their meadows; compel the gods to descend upon the stage, and hell itself to furnish its

<sup>1</sup> The great Chancellor Barleigh often wept, so harshly was he used by Elizabeth.

world of marvels. No other theatre is so complicated ; for nowhere else do we find men so complete.

### III.

In this free and universal expansion, the passions had their special bent withal, which was an English one, inasmuch as they were English. After all, in every age, under every civilisation, a people is always itself. Whatever be its dress, goat-skin blouse, gold-laced doublet, black dress-coat, the five or six great instincts which it possessed in its forests, follow it in its palaces and offices. To this day, warlike passions, a gloomy humour, subsist under the regularity and propriety of modern manners.<sup>1</sup> Their native energy and harshness pierce through the perfection of culture and the habits of comfort. Rich young men, on leaving Oxford, go to hunt bears on the Rocky Mountains, the elephant in South Africa, live under canvas, box, jump hedges on horseback, sail their yachts on dangerous coasts, delight in solitude and peril. The ancient Saxon, the old rover of the Scandinavian seas, has not perished. Even at school the children roughly treat one another, withstand one another, fight like men ; and their character is so indomitable, that they need the birch and blows to reduce them to the discipline of law. Judge what they were in the sixteenth century ; the English race passed then for the most warlike of Europe, the most redoubtable in battle, the most impatient of anything like slavery.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Compare, to understand this character, the parts assigned to James Harlowe by Richardson, old Osborne by Thackeray, Sir Giles Overreach by Massinger, and Manly by Wycherley.

<sup>2</sup> Hentzner's *Travels* ; Benvenuto Cellini. See *passim*, the costumes printed in Venice and Germany : *Belliciosissimi*. Froude, i. pp. 19, 52.

"English savages" is what Cellini calls them; and the "great shins of beef" with which they fill themselves, keep up the force and ferocity of their instincts. To harden them thoroughly, institutions work in the same groove with nature. The nation is armed, every man is brought up like a soldier, bound to have arms according to his condition, to exercise himself on Sundays or holidays; from the yeoman to the lord, the old military constitution keeps them enrolled and ready for action.<sup>1</sup> In a state which resembles an army, it is necessary that punishments, as in an army, shall inspire terror; and to make them worse, the hideous Wars of the Roses, which on every flaw of the succession to the throne are ready to break out again, are ever present in their recollection. Such instincts, such a constitution, such a history, raises before them, with tragic severity, an idea of life: death is at hand, as well as wounds, the block, tortures. The fine cloaks of purple which the Renaissances of the South displayed joyfully in the sun, to wear like a holiday garment, are here stained with blood, and edged with black. Throughout,<sup>2</sup> a stern discipline, and the axe ready for every suspicion of treason; great men, bishops, a chancellor, princes, the king's relatives, queens, a protector, all kneeling in the straw, sprinkled the Tower with their blood; one after the other they marched past, stretched out their necks; the Duke of Buckingham, Queen Anne Boleyn, Queen Catherine Howard, the Earl of Surrey, Admiral Seymour, the Duke of Somerset, Lady Jane Grey and her husband, the Duke of Nor-

<sup>1</sup> This is not so true of the English now, if it was in the sixteenth century, as it is of continental nations. The French *lycées* are far more military in character than English schools.—TR.

<sup>2</sup> Froude's *Hist. of England*, vols. i. ii. iii.

thumberland, Mary Stewart, the Earl of Essex, all on the throne, or on the steps of the throne, in the highest rank of honours, beauty, youth, and genius; of the bright procession nothing is left but senseless trunks, marred by the tender mercies of the executioner. Shall I count the funeral pyres, the hangings, living men cut down from the gibbet, disembowelled, quartered,<sup>1</sup> their limbs cast into the fire, their heads exposed on the walls? There is a page in Holinshed which reads like a death register :

"The five and twentieth daie of Maie (1535), was in saint Paules church at London examined nineteene men and six women born in Holland, whose opinions were (heretical). Fourteene of them were condemned, a man and a woman of them were burned in Smithfield, the other twelve were sent to other townes, there to be burnt. On the nineteenth of June were three moonkes of the Charterhouse hanged, drawne, and quartered at Tiburne, and their heads and quarters set up about London, for denieng the king to be supreme head of the church. Also the one and twentieth of the same moneth, and for the same cause, doctor John Fisher, bishop of Rochester, was beheaded for denieng of the supremacie, and his head set upon London bridge, but his bodie buried within Barking churchyard. The pope had elected him a cardinall, and sent his hat as far as Calais, but his head was off before his hat was on : so that they met not. On the sixt of Julie was Sir Thomas Moore beheaded for the like crime, that is to wit, for denieng the king to be supreme head." <sup>2</sup>

None of these murders seem extraordinary; the chroniclers mention them without growing indignant; the condemned go quietly to the block, as if the thing were

<sup>1</sup> "When his heart was torn out he uttered a deep groan."—*Execution of Parry*; Strype, iii. 251.

<sup>2</sup> Holinshed, *Chronicles of England*, iii. p. 793.



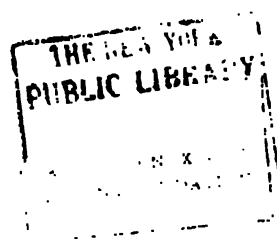
perfectly natural. Anne Boleyn said seriously, before giving up her head to the executioner: "I praise God save the king, and send him long to reigne over you, for a gentler, nor a more mercifull prince was there never."<sup>1</sup> Society is, as it were, in a state of siege, so incited that beneath the idea of order every one entertained the idea of the scaffold. They saw it, the terrible machine, planted on all the highways of human life; and the byways as well as the highways led to it. A sort of martial law, introduced by conquests into civil affairs, entered thence into ecclesiastical matters,<sup>2</sup> and social economy ended by being enslaved by it. As in a camp,<sup>3</sup> expenditure, dress, the food of each class, are fixed and restricted; no one might stray out of his district, be idle, live after his own devices. Every stranger was seized, interrogated; if he could not give a good account of himself, the parish-stocks bruised his limbs; as in time of war he would have passed for a spy and an enemy, if caught amidst the army. Any person, says the law,<sup>4</sup> found living idly or loiteringly for the space of three days, shall be marked with a hot iron on his breast, and adjudged as a slave to the man who shall inform against him. This one "shall take the same slave, and give him bread, water, or small drink, and refuse meat, and cause him to work, by beating, chaining, or otherwise, in such work and labour as he shall put him to, be it never so vile." He may sell him, bequeath him, let him out for hire, or trade upon him "after the like sort as they may do of any other their moveable goods or chattels," put a ring of iron about his neck or leg; if he runs away and absents

<sup>1</sup> Holinshed, *Chronicles of England*, iii. p. 797.

<sup>2</sup> Under Henry IV. and Henry V.

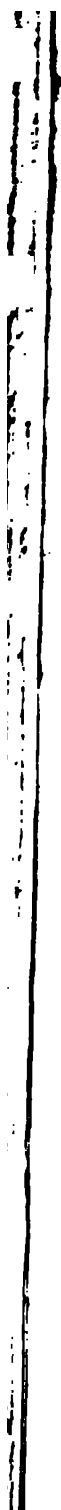
<sup>3</sup> Froude, i. 15.

<sup>4</sup> In 1547.





*SIR THOMAS MORE*



himself for fourteen days, he is branded on the forehead with a hot iron, and remains a slave for the whole of his life; if he runs away a second time, he is put to death. Sometimes, says More, you might see a score of thieves hung on the same gibbet. In one year<sup>1</sup> forty persons were put to death in the county of Somerset alone, and in each county there were three or four hundred vagabonds who would sometimes gather together and rob in armed bands of sixty at a time. Follow the whole of this history closely, the fires of Mary, the pillories of Elizabeth, and it is plain that the moral tone of the land, like its physical condition, is harsh by comparison with other countries. They have no relish in their enjoyments, as in Italy; what is called Merry England is England given up to animal spirits, a coarse animation produced by abundant feeding, continued prosperity, courage, and self-reliance; voluptuousness does not exist in this climate and this race. Mingled with the beautiful popular beliefs, the lugubrious dreams and the cruel nightmare of witchcraft make their appearance. Bishop Jewell, preaching before the queen, tells her that witches and sorcerers within these few last years are marvellously increased. Some ministers assert

“ That they have had in their parish at one instant, xvij or xvijj witches; meaning such as could worke miracles supernaturallie; that they work spells by which men pine away even unto death, their colour fadeth, their flesh rotteth, their speech is benumbed, their senses are bereft; that instructed by the devil, they make ointments of the bowels and members of children, whereby they ride in the aire, and accomplish all their desires. When a child is not baptized, or defended by the sign of

<sup>1</sup> In 1596.

the cross, then the witches catch them from their mothers sides in the night . . . kill them . . . or after buriall steale them out of their graves, and seeth them in a caldron, untill their flesh be made potable. . . . It is an infallible rule, that everie fortnight, or at the least everie moneth, each witch must kill one child at the least for hir part."

Here was something to make the teeth chatter with fright. Add to this revolting and absurd descriptions, wretched tomfooleries, details about the infernal cauldron, all the nastinesses which could haunt the trite imagination of a hideous and drivelling old woman, and you have the spectacles, provided by Middleton and Shakspeare, and which suit the sentiments of the age and the national humour. The fundamental gloom pierces through the glow and rapture of poetry. Mournful legends have multiplied; every churchyard has its ghost; wherever a man has been murdered his spirit appears. Many people dare not leave their village after sunset. In the evening, before bed-time, men talk of the coach which is seen drawn by headless horses, with headless postilions and coachmen, or of unhappy spirits who, compelled to inhabit the plain, under the sharp north-east wind, pray for the shelter of a hedge or a valley. They dream terribly of death:

"To die and go we know not where;  
To lie in cold obstruction and to rot;  
This sensible warm motion to become  
A kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit  
To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside  
In thrilling regions of thick-ribbed ice;  
To be imprison'd in the viewless winds,  
And blown with restless violence round about  
The pendent world; or to be worse than worst

Of those that lawless and incertain thought  
Imagine howling : 'tis too horrible ! " <sup>1</sup>

The greatest speak with a sad resignation of the infinite obscurity which embraces our poor, short, glimmering life, our life, which is but a troubled dream ;<sup>2</sup> the sad state of humanity, which is but passion, madness, and sorrow ; the human being who is himself, perhaps, but a vain phantom, a grievous sick man's dream. In their eyes we roll down a fatal slope, where chance dashes us one against the other, and the inner destiny which urges us onward, only shatters after it has blinded us. And at the end of all is "the silent grave, no conversation, no joyful tread of friends, no voice of lovers, no careful father's counsel ; nothing's heard, nor nothing is, but all oblivion, dust, and endless darkness."<sup>3</sup> If yet there were nothing. "To die, to sleep ; to sleep, perchance to dream." To dream sadly, to fall into a nightmare like the nightmare of life, like that in which we are struggling and crying to-day, gasping with hoarse throat !—this is their idea of man and of existence, the national idea, which fills the stage with calamities and despair, which makes a display of tortures and massacres, which abounds in madness and crime, which holds up death as the issue throughout. A threatening and sombre fog veils their mind like their sky, and joy, like the sun, only appears in its full force now and then. They are different from the Latin race,

<sup>1</sup> Shakspeare, *Measure for Measure*, Act iii. 1. See also *The Tempest*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*.

<sup>2</sup> " We are such stuff  
As dreams are made on, and our little life  
Is rounded with a sleep."—*Tempest*, iv. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Beaumont and Fletcher, *Thierry and Theodoret*, Act iv. 1.



and in the common Renaissance they are regenerated otherwise than the Latin races. The free and full development of pure nature which, in Greece and Italy, ends in the painting of beauty and happy energy, ends here in the painting of ferocious energy, agony, and death.

#### IV.

Thus was this theatre produced ; a theatre unique in history, like the admirable and fleeting epoch from which it sprang, the work and the picture of this young world, as natural, as unshackled, and as tragic as itself. When an original and national drama springs up, the poets who establish it, carry in themselves the sentiments which it represents. They display better than other men the feelings of the public, because those feelings are stronger in them than in other men. The passions which surround them, break forth in their heart with a harsher or a juster cry, and hence their voices become the voices of all. Chivalric and Catholic Spain had her interpreters in her enthusiasts and her Don Quixotes : in Calderon, first a soldier, afterwards a priest ; in Lope de Vega, a volunteer at fifteen, a passionate lover, a wandering duellist, a soldier of the Armada, finally, a priest and familiar of the Holy Office ; so full of fervour that he fasts till he is exhausted, faints with emotion while singing mass, and in his flagellations stains the walls of his cell with blood. Calm and noble Greece had in her principal tragic poet one of the most accomplished and fortunate of her sons :<sup>1</sup> Sophocles, first in song and palaestra ; who at fifteen sang, unclad, the psalm before the trophy of Salamis, and who afterwards,

<sup>1</sup> Διεπονθή δ' ἐν πασι καὶ περὶ παλαίστραν καὶ μουσικῇ, ἐξ ὧν ἀμφότεων ἐτεφανίσθη . . . Φιλαθηναϊστάτος καὶ θεοφιλῆς.—Scholiast.

as ambassador, general, ever loving the gods and impassioned for his state, presented, in his life as in his works, the spectacle of the incomparable harmony which made the beauty of the ancient world, and which the modern world will never more attain to. Eloquent and worldly France, in the age which carried the art of good manners and conversation to its highest pitch, finds, to write her oratorical tragedies and to paint her drawing-room passions, the most able craftsman of words, Racine, a courtier, a man of the world ; the most capable, by the delicacy of his tact and the adaptation of his style, of making men of the world and courtiers speak. So in England the poets are in harmony with their works. Almost all are Bohemians ; they sprung from the people,<sup>1</sup> were educated, and usually studied at Oxford or Cambridge, but they were poor, so that their education contrasts with their condition. Ben Jonson is the step-son of a bricklayer, and himself a bricklayer ; Marlowe is the son of a shoemaker ; Shakspeare of a wool merchant ; Massinger of a servant of a noble family.<sup>2</sup> They live as they can, get into debt, write for their bread, go on the stage. Peele, Lodge, Marlowe, Ben Jonson, Shakspeare, Heywood, are actors ; most of the details which we have of their lives are taken from the journal of Henslowe, a retired pawnbroker, later a money-lender and manager of a theatre, who gives them work, advances money to them, receives their manuscripts or their wardrobes as security. For a play he

<sup>1</sup> Except Beaumont and Fletcher.

<sup>2</sup> Hartley Coleridge, in his *Introduction to the Dramatic Works of Massinger and Ford*, says of Massinger's father : " We are not certified of the situation which he held in the noble household (Earl of Pembroke), but we may be sure that it was neither menial nor mean. Service in those days was not derogatory to gentle birth."—Ta.

gives seven or eight pounds ; after the year 1600 prices rise, and reach as high as twenty or twenty-five pounds. It is clear that, even after this increase, the trade of author scarcely brings in bread. In order to earn money, it was necessary, like Shakspeare, to become a manager, to try to have a share in the property of a theatre ; but such success is rare, and the life which they lead, a life of actors and artists, improvident, full of excess, lost amid debauchery and acts of violence, amidst women of evil fame, in contact with young profligates, among the temptations of misery, imagination and licence, generally leads them to exhaustion, poverty, and death. Men received enjoyment from them, but neglected and despised them. One actor, for a political allusion, was sent to prison, and only just escaped losing his ears ; great men, men in office, abused them like servants. Heywood, who played almost every day, bound himself, in addition, to write a sheet daily, for several years composes at haphazard in taverns, labours and sweats like a true literary hack, and dies leaving two hundred and twenty pieces, of which most are lost. Kyd, one of the earliest in date, died in misery. Shirley, one of the last, at the end of his career, was obliged to become once more a schoolmaster. Massinger dies unknown ; and in the parish register we find only this sad mention of him : " Philip Massinger, a stranger." A few months after the death of Middleton, his widow was obliged to ask alms of the City, because he had left nothing. Imagination, as Drummond said of Ben Jonson, oppressed their reason ; it is the common failing of poets. They wish to enjoy, and give themselves wholly up to enjoyment ; their mood, their heart governs them ; in their life, as

in their works, impulses are irresistible; desire comes suddenly, like a wave, drowning reason, resistance—often even giving neither reason nor resistance time to show themselves.<sup>1</sup> Many are roysterers, sad roysterers of the same sort, such as Musset and Murger, who give themselves up to every passion, and “drown their sorrows in the bowl;” capable of the purest and most poetic dreams, of the most delicate and touching tenderness, and who yet can only undermine their health and mar their fame. Such are Nash, Decker, and Greene; Nash, a fantastic satirist, who abused his talent, and conspired like a prodigal against good fortune; Decker, who passed three years in the King’s Bench prison; Greene, above all, a pleasing wit, copious, graceful, who took a delight in destroying himself, publicly with tears confessing his vices,<sup>2</sup> and the next moment plunging into them again. These are mere androgynes, true courtesans, in manners, body, and heart. Quitting Cambridge, “with good fellows as free-living as himself,” Greene had travelled over Spain, Italy, “in which places he sawe and practizde such villainie as is abhominable to declare.” You see the poor man is candid, not sparing himself; he is natural; passionate in everything, repentance or otherwise; above all of ever-varying mood; made for self-contradiction; not self-correction. On his return he became, in London, a supporter of taverns,

<sup>1</sup> See, amongst others, *The Woman Killed with Kindness*, by Heywood. Mrs. Frankfort, so upright of heart, accepts Wendoll at his first offer. Sir Francis Acton, at the sight of her whom he wishes to dishonour, and whom he hates, falls “into an ecstasy,” and dreams of nothing save marriage. Compare the sudden transport of Juliet, Romeo, Macbeth, Miranda, etc.; the counsel of Prospero to Fernando, when he leaves him alone for a moment with Miranda.

<sup>2</sup> Compare *La Vie de Bohème* and *Les Nuits d’Hiver*, by Murger; *Confession d’un Enfant du Siècle*, by A. de Musset.

a haunter of evil places. In his *Groatsworth of Wit bought with a Million of Repentance* he says :

"I was dround in pride, whoredom was my daily exercise, and gluttony with drunkenness was my onely delight. . . . After I had wholly betaken me to the penning of plaies (which was my continuall exercise) I was so far from calling upon God that I sildome thought on God, but tooke such delight in swearing and blaspheming the name of God that none could thinke otherwise of me than that I was the child of perdition. These vanities and other trifling pamphlets I penned of love and vaine fantasies was my chieftest stay of living ; and for those my vaine discourses I was beloved of the more vainer sort of people, who being my continuall companions, came still to my lodging, and there would continue quaffing, carousing, and surfeting with me all the day long. . . . If I may have my disire while I live I am satisfied ; let me shift after death as I may. . . . 'Hell !' quoth I ; 'what talke you of hell to me ? I know if I once come there I shall have the company of better men than myselfe ; I shall also meete with some madde knaves in that place, and so long as I shall not sit there alone, my care is the lesse. . . . If I feared the judges of the bench no more than I dread the judgments of God I would before I slept dive into one carles bagges or other, and make merrie with the shelles I found in them so long as they would last.'"

A little later he is seized with remorse, marries, depicts in delicious verse the regularity and calm of an upright life ; then returns to London, spends his property and his wife's fortune with "a sorry ragged queane," in the company of ruffians, pimps, sharpers, courtesans ; drinking, blaspheming, wearing himself out by sleepless nights and orgies ; writing for bread, sometimes amid the brawling and effluvia of his wretched lodging, lighting upon thoughts of adoration and love, worthy

of Rolla;<sup>1</sup> very often disgusted with himself, seized with a fit of weeping between two merry bouts, and writing little pieces to accuse himself, to regret his wife, to convert his comrades, or to warn young people against the tricks of prostitutes and swindlers. He was soon worn out by this kind of life; six years were enough to exhaust him. An indigestion arising from Rhenish wine and pickled herrings finished him. If it had not been for his landlady, who succoured him, he "would have perished in the streets." He lasted a little longer, and then his light went out; now and then he begged her "pittifully for a penny pott of malmesie;" he was covered with lice, he had but one shirt, and when his own was "a washing," he was obliged to borrow her husband's. "His doublet and hose and sword were sold for three shillings," and the poor folks paid the cost of his burial, four shillings for the winding-sheet, and six and fourpence for the burial.

In such low places, on such dunghills, amid such excesses and violence, dramatic genius forced its way, and amongst others, that of the first, of the most powerful, of the true founder of the dramatic school, Christopher Marlowe.

Marlowe was an ill-regulated, dissolute, outrageously vehement and audacious spirit, but grand and sombre, with the genuine poetic frenzy; pagan moreover, and rebellious in manners and creed. In this universal return to the senses, and in this impulse of natural forces which brought on the Renaissance, the corporeal instincts and the ideas which hallow them, break forth impetuously. Marlowe, like Greene, like Kett,<sup>2</sup> is a

<sup>1</sup> The hero of one of Alfred de Musset's poems.—Tz.

<sup>2</sup> Burnt in 1589.

sceptic, denies God and Christ, blasphemes the Trinity, declares Moses "a juggler," Christ more worthy of death than Barabbas, says that "yf he wer to write a new religion, he wolde undertake both a more excellent and more admirable methode," and "almost in every company he commeth, perswadeth men to Athiesme."<sup>1</sup> Such were the rages, the rashnesses, the excesses which liberty of thought gave rise to in these new minds, who for the first time, after so many centuries, dared to walk unfettered. From his father's shop, crowded with children, from the straps and awls, he found himself studying at Cambridge, probably through the patronage of a great man, and on his return to London, in want, amid the licence of the green-room, the low houses and taverns, his head was in a ferment, and his passions became excited. He turned actor; but having broken his leg in a scene of debauchery, he remained lame, and could no longer appear on the boards. He openly avowed his infidelity, and a prosecution was begun, which, if time had not failed, would probably have brought him to the stake. He made love to a drab, and in trying to stab his rival, his hand was turned, so that his own blade entered his eye and his brain, and he died, cursing and blaspheming. He was only thirty years old.

Think what poetry could emanate from a life so passionate, and occupied in such a manner! First, exaggerated declamation, heaps of murder, atrocities; a pompous and furious display of tragedy bespattered with blood, and passions raised to a pitch of madness. All the foundations of the English stage, *Ferrex* and

<sup>1</sup> I have used Marlowe's *Works*, ed. Dyce, 3 vols., 1850. Append. I. vol. 2.—Tr.

*Porrex, Cambyzes, Hieronymo*, even the *Pericles* of Shakspeare, reach the same height of extravagance, magniloquence, and horror.<sup>1</sup> It is the first outbreak of youth. Recall Schiller's *Robbers*, and how modern democracy has recognised for the first time its picture in the metaphors and cries of Charles Moor.<sup>2</sup> So here the characters struggle and roar, stamp on the earth, gnash their teeth, shake their fists against heaven. The trumpets sound, the drums beat, coats of mail file past, armies clash, men stab each other, or themselves; speeches are full of gigantic threats and lyrical figures;<sup>3</sup> kings die, straining a bass voice; "now doth ghastly death with greedy talons gripe my bleeding heart, and like a harpy tires on my life." The hero in *Tamburlaine the Great*<sup>4</sup> is seated on a chariot drawn by chained kings;

<sup>1</sup> See especially *Titus Andronicus*, attributed to Shakspeare: there are parricides, mothers whom they cause to eat their children, a young girl who appears on the stage violated, with her tongue and hands cut off.

<sup>2</sup> The chief character in Schiller's *Robbers*, a virtuous brigand and redresser of wrongs.—Tr.

<sup>3</sup> For in a field, whose superficies  
Is cover'd with a liquid purple veil,  
And sprinkled with the brains of slaughter'd men,  
My royal chair of state shall be advanc'd;  
And he that means to place himself therein,  
Must armed wade up to the chin in blood. . . .  
And I would strive to swim through pools of blood,  
Or make a bridge of murder'd carcases,  
Whose arches should be fram'd with bones of Turks,  
Ere I would lose the title of a king.

*Tamburlaine*, part ii. i. 3.

<sup>4</sup> The editor of Marlowe's *Works*, Pickering, 1826, says in his Introduction: "Both the matter and style of *Tamburlaine*, however, differ materially from Marlowe's other compositions, and doubts have more than once been suggested as to whether the play was properly assigned to him. We think that Marlowe did not write it." Dyce is of a contrary opinion.—Tr.



he burns towns, drowns women and children, puts men to the sword, and finally, seized with an inscrutable sickness, raves in monstrous outcries against the gods, whose hands afflict his soul, and whom he would fain dethrone. There already is the picture of senseless pride, of blind and murderous rage, which passing through many devastations, at last arms against heaven itself. The overflowing of savage and immoderate instinct produces this mighty sounding verse, this prodigality of carnage, this display of splendours and exaggerated colours, this railing of demoniacal passions, this audacity of grand impiety. If in the dramas which succeed it, *The Massacre at Paris*, *The Jew of Malta*, the bombast decreases, the violence remains. Barabas the Jew maddened with hate, is thenceforth no longer human ; he has been treated by the Christians like a beast, and he hates them like a beast. He advises his servant Ithamore in the following words :

“Hast thou no trade ? then listen to my words,  
And I will teach thee that shall stick by thee :  
First, be thou void of these affections,  
Compassion, love, vain hope, and heartless fear ;  
Be mov'd at nothing, see thou pity none,  
But to thyself smile when the Christians moan.  
    . . . I walk abroad a-nights,  
And kill sick people groaning under walls ;  
Sometimes I go about and poison wells . . .  
Being young, I studied physic, and began  
To practise first upon the Italian ;  
There I enrich'd the priests with burials,  
And always kept the sexton's arms in ure  
With digging graves and ringing dead men's knells . . .  
I fill'd the jails with bankrupts in a year,  
And with young orphans planted hospitals ;

And every moon made some or other mad,  
 And now and then one hang himself for grief,  
 Pinning upon his breast a long great scroll  
 How I with interest tormented him."<sup>1</sup>

All these cruelties he boasts of and chuckles over, like a demon who rejoices in being a good executioner, and plunges his victims in the very extremity of anguish. His daughter has two Christian suitors; and by forged letters he causes them to slay each other. In despair she takes the veil, and to avenge himself he poisons his daughter and the whole convent. Two friars wish to denounce him, then to convert him; he strangles the first, and jokes with his slave Ithamore, a cut-throat by profession, who loves his trade, rubs his hands with joy, and says:

"Pull amain,

"Tis neatly done, sir; here's no print at all.

So, let him lean upon his staff; excellent! he stands as if he were begging of bacon."<sup>2</sup>

"O mistress, I have the bravest, gravest, secret, subtle, bottle-nosed knave to my master, that ever gentleman had."<sup>3</sup>

The second friar comes up, and they accuse him of the murder:

"*Barabas*. Heaven bless me! what, a friar a murderer!

When shall you see a Jew commit the like?

*Ithamore*. Why, a Turk could ha' done no more.

*Bar*. To-morrow is the sessions; you shall to it—

Come Ithamore, let's help to take him hence.

*Friar*. Villains, I am a sacred person; touch me not.

*Bar*. The law shall touch you; we'll but lead you, we:

'Lae, I could weep at your calamity!"<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*, ii. p. 275 *et passim*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* iv. p. 311.    <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* iii. p. 291.    <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* iv. p. 313.

We have also two other poisonings, an infernal machine to blow up the Turkish garrison, a plot to cast the Turkish commander into a well. Barabas falls into it himself, and dies in the hot cauldron,<sup>1</sup> howling, hardened, remorseless, having but one regret, that he had not done evil enough. These are the ferocities of the middle-age; we might find them to this day among the companions of Ali Pacha, among the pirates of the Archipelago; we retain pictures of them in the paintings of the fifteenth century, which represent a king with his court, seated calmly round a living man who is being flayed; in the midst the flayer on his knees is working conscientiously, very careful not to spoil the skin.<sup>2</sup>

All this is pretty strong, you will say; these people kill too readily, and too quickly. It is on this very account that the painting is a true one. For the specialty of the men of the time, as of Marlowe's characters, is the abrupt commission of a deed; they are children, robust children. As a horse kicks out instead of speaking, so they pull out their knives instead of asking an explanation. Nowadays we hardly know what nature is; instead of observing it we still retain the benevolent prejudices of the eighteenth century; we only see it humanised by two centuries of culture, and we take its acquired calm for an innate moderation. The foundations of the natural man are irresistible impulses, passions, desires, greeds; all blind. He sees a woman,<sup>3</sup> thinks her beautiful; suddenly he rushes towards her; people try to restrain him, he kills these

<sup>1</sup> Up to this time, in England, poisoners were cast into a boiling cauldron.

<sup>2</sup> In the Museum of Ghent.

<sup>3</sup> See in the *Jew of Malta* the seduction of Ithamore, by Bellamira, a rough, but truly admirable picture.

people, gluts his passion, then thinks no more of it, save when at times a vague picture of a moving lake of blood crosses his brain and makes him gloomy. Sudden and extreme resolves are confused in his mind with desire; barely planned, the thing is done; the wide interval which a Frenchman places between the idea of an action and the action itself is not to be found here.<sup>1</sup> Barabas conceived murders, and straightway murders were accomplished; there is no deliberation, no pricks of conscience; that is how he commits a score of them; his daughter leaves him, he becomes unnatural, and poisons her; his confidential servant betrays him, he disguises himself, and poisons him. Rage seizes these men like a fit, and then they are forced to kill. Benvenuto Cellini relates how, being offended, he tried to restrain himself, but was nearly suffocated; and that in order to cure himself, he rushed with his dagger upon his opponent. So, in *Edward II.*, the nobles immediately appeal to arms; all is excessive and unforeseen: between two replies the heart is turned upside down, transported to the extremes of hate or tenderness. Edward, seeing his favourite Gaveston again, pours out before him his treasure, casts his dignities at his feet, gives him his seal, himself, and, on a threat from the Bishop of Coventry, suddenly cries:

“Throw off his golden mitre, rend his stole,  
And in the channel christen him anew.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Nothing could be falser than the hesitation and arguments of Schiller's *William Tell*; for a contrast, see Goethe's *Goetz von Berlichingen*. In 1377, Wiclif pleaded in St. Paul's before the Bishop of London, and that raised a quarrel. The Duke of Lancaster, Wiclif's protector, “threatened to drag the bishop out of the church by the hair;” and next day the furious crowd sacked the duke's palace.

<sup>2</sup> Marlowe, *Edward the Second*, i. p. 178.

Then, when the queen supplicates :

“ Pawn not on me, French strumpet ! get thee gone . . .  
 Speak not unto her : let her droop and pine.”<sup>1</sup>

Furies and hatreds clash together like horsemen in battle. The Earl of Lancaster draws his sword on Gaveston to slay him, before the king; Mortimer wounds Gaveston. These powerful loud voices growl; the noblemen will not even let a dog approach the prince, and rob them of their rank. Lancaster says of Gaveston :

“ . . . . He comes not back,  
 Unless the sea cast up his shipwreck'd body.  
*Warwick.* And to behold so sweet a sight as that,  
 There's none here but would run his horse to death.”<sup>2</sup>

They have seized Gaveston, and intend to hang him “ at a bough ;” they refuse to let him speak a single minute with the king. In vain they are entreated ; when they do at last consent, they are sorry for it ; it is a prey they want immediately, and Warwick, seizing him by force, “ strake off his head in a trench.” Those are the men of the middle-age. They have the fierceness, the tenacity, the pride of big, well-fed, thorough-bred bulldogs. It is this sternness and impetuosity of primitive passions which produced the Wars of the Roses, and for thirty years drove the nobles on each other's swords and to the block.

What is there beyond all these frenzies and gluttings of blood ? The idea of crushing necessity and inevitable ruin in which everything sinks and comes to an end. Mortimer, brought to the block, says with a smile :

<sup>1</sup> Marlowe, *Edward the Second*, p. 186.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 183.

"Base Fortune, now I see, that in thy wheel  
There is a point, to which when men aspire,  
They tumble headlong down : that point I touch'd,  
And, seeing there was no place to mount up higher,  
Why should I grieve at my declining fall ?—  
Farewell, fair queen ; weep not for Mortimer,  
That scorns the world, and, as a traveller,  
Goes to discover countries yet unknown."<sup>1</sup>

Weigh well these grand words ; they are a cry from the heart, the profound confession of Marlowe, as also of Byron, and of the old sea-kings. The northern paganism is fully expressed in this heroic and mournful sigh : it is thus they imagine the world so long as they remain on the outside of Christianity, or as soon as they quit it. Thus, when men see in life, as they did, nothing but a battle of unchecked passions, and in death but a gloomy sleep, perhaps filled with mournful dreams, there is no other supreme good but a day of enjoyment and victory. They glut themselves, shutting their eyes to the issue, except that they may be swallowed up on the morrow. That is the master-thought of *Doctor Faustus*, the greatest of Marlowe's dramas : to satisfy his soul, no matter at what price, or with what results :

"A sound magician is a mighty god. . . .  
How am I glutted with conceit of this ! . . .  
I'll have them fly to India for gold,  
Ransack the ocean for orient pearl. . . .  
I'll have them read me strange philosophy,  
And tell the secrets of all foreign kings ;  
I'll have them wall all Germany with brass,  
And make swift Rhine circle fair Wertenberg. . . .

<sup>1</sup> *Edward the Second*, last scene, p. 233.

Like lions shall they guard us when we please ;  
 Like Almain rutters with their horsemen's staves,  
 Or Lapland giants, trotting by our sides ;  
 Sometimes like women, or unwedded maids,  
 Shadowing more beauty in their airy brows  
 Than have the white breasts of the queen of love."<sup>1</sup>

What brilliant dreams, what desires, what vast or voluptuous wishes, worthy of a Roman Cæsar or an eastern poet, eddy in this teeming brain ! To satiate them, to obtain four-and-twenty years of power, Faustus gives his soul, without fear, without need of temptation, at the first outset, voluntarily, so sharp is the prick within :

" Had I as many souls as there be stars,  
 I'd give them all for Mephistophilis.  
 By him I'll be great emperor of the world,  
 And make a bridge thorough the moving air. . . .  
 Why shouldst thou not ? Is not thy soul thine own ? " <sup>2</sup>

And with that he gives himself full swing : he wants to know everything, to have everything ; a book in which he can behold all herbs and trees which grow upon the earth ; another in which shall be drawn all the constellations and planets ; another which shall bring him gold when he wills it, and " the fairest courtezans : " another which summons " men in armour " ready to execute his commands, and which holds " whirlwinds, tempests, thunder and lightning " chained at his disposal. He is like a child, he stretches out his hands for everything shining ; then grieves to think of hell, then lets himself be diverted by shows :

<sup>1</sup> Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, i. p. 9, *et passim*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 22, 29.

*Faustus.* O this feeds my soul !

*Lucifer.* Tut, Faustus, in hell is all manner of delight.

*Faustus.* Oh, might I see hell, and return again,

How happy were I then ! " . . . .<sup>1</sup>

He is conducted, being invisible, over the whole world : lastly to Rome, amongst the ceremonies of the Pope's court. Like a schoolboy during a holiday, he has insatiable eyes, he forgets everything before a pageant, he amuses himself in playing tricks, in giving the Pope a box on the ear, in beating the monks, in performing magic tricks before princes, finally in drinking, feasting, filling his belly, deadening his thoughts. In his transport he becomes an atheist, and says there is no hell, that those are "old wives' tales." Then suddenly the sad idea knocks at the gates of his brain.

"I will renounce this magic, and repent . . .

My heart's so harden'd, I cannot repent :

Scarce can I name salvation, faith, or heaven,

But fearful echoes thunder in mine ears,

'Faustus, thou art damn'd !' then swords, and knives,

Poison, guns, halters, and envenom'd steel

Are laid before me to despatch myself ;

And long ere this I should have done the deed,

Had not sweet pleasure conquer'd deep despair.

Have not I made blind Homer sing to me

Of Alexander's love and Cænon's death ?

And hath not he, that built the walls of Thebes

With ravishing sound of his melodious harp,

Made music with my Mephistophilis ?

Why should I die, then, or basely despair ?

I am resolv'd ; Faustus shall ne'er repent—

Come Mephistophilis, let us dispute again,

And argue of divine astrology.

<sup>1</sup> Marlowe. *Doctor Faustus*, i. p. 48.



Tell me, are there many heavens above the moon ?  
 Are all celestial bodies but one globe,  
 As is the substance of this centric earth ? . . . " <sup>1</sup>  
 "One thing . . . let me crave of thee  
 To glut the longing of my heart's desire. . . .  
 Was this the face that launch'd a thousand ships,  
 And burnt the topless towers of Ilium ?  
 Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss !  
 Her lips suck forth my soul : see, where it flies !—  
 Come, Helen, come, give me my soul again.  
 Here will I dwell, for heaven is in these lips,  
 And all is dross that is not Helena. . . .  
 O thou art fairer than the evening air  
 Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars ! " <sup>2</sup>

"Oh, my God, I would weep ! but the devil draws in  
 my tears. Gush forth blood, instead of tears ! yea, life  
 and soul ! Oh, he stays my tongue ! I would lift up  
 my hands ; but see, they hold them, they hold them ;  
 Lucifer and Mephistophilis." . . . <sup>3</sup>

"Ah, Faustus,  
 Now hast thou but one bare hour to live,  
 And then thou must be damn'd perpetually !  
 Stand still, you ever-moving spheres of heaven,  
 That time may cease, and midnight never come. . . .  
 The stars move still, time runs, the clock will strike,  
 The devil will come, and Faustus must be damn'd.  
 Oh, I'll leap up to my God !—Who pulls me down !—  
 See, see, where Christ's blood streams in the firmament !  
 One drop would save my soul, half a drop : ah, my Christ,  
 Ah, rend not my heart for naming of my Christ,  
 Yet will I call on him. . . .  
 Ah, half the hour is past ! 'twill all be past anon. . . .

<sup>1</sup> Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 75.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 78.

Let Faustus live in hell a thousand years,  
A hundred thousand, and at last be sav'd. . . .  
It strikes, it strikes. . . .  
Oh soul, be chang'd into little water-drops,  
And fall into the ocean, ne'er be found !"<sup>1</sup>

There is the living, struggling, natural, personal man, not the philosophic type which Goethe has created, but a primitive and genuine man, hot-headed, fiery, the slave of his passions, the sport of his dreams, wholly engrossed in the present, moulded by his lusts, contradictions, and follies, who amidst noise and starts, cries of pleasure and anguish, rolls, knowing it and willing it, down the slope and crags of his precipice. The whole English drama is here, as a plant in its seed, and Marlowe is to Shakspeare what Perugino was to Raphael.

## V.

Gradually art is being formed ; and toward the close of the century it is complete. Shakspeare, Beaumont, Fletcher, Ben Jonson, Webster, Massinger, Ford, Middleton, Heywood, appear together, or close upon each other, a new and favoured generation, flourishing largely in the soil fertilised by the efforts of the generation which preceded them. Thenceforth the scenes are developed and assume consistency ; the characters cease to move all of a piece, the drama is no longer like a piece of statuary. The poet who a little while ago knew only how to strike or kill, introduces now a sequence of situation and a rationale in intrigue. He begins to prepare the way for sentiments, to forewarn us of events, to combine effects, and we find a theatre at last, the

<sup>1</sup> Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, p. 80.

most complete, the most life-like, and also the most strange that ever existed.

We must follow its formation, and regard the drama when it was formed, that is, in the minds of its authors. What was going on in these minds? What sorts of ideas were born there, and how were they born? In the first place, they see the event, whatever it be, and they see it as it is; I mean that they have it within themselves, with its persons and details, beautiful and ugly, even dull and grotesque. If it is a trial, the judge is there, in their minds, in his place, with his physiognomy and his warts; the plaintiff in another place, with his spectacles and brief-bag; the accused is opposite, stooping and remorseful; each with his friends, cobblers, or lords; then the buzzing crowd behind, all with their grinning faces, their bewildered or kindling eyes.<sup>1</sup> It is a genuine trial which they imagine, a trial like those they have seen before the justice, where they screamed or shouted as witnesses or interested parties, with their quibbling terms, their pros and cons, the scribblings, the sharp voices of the counsel, the stamping of feet, the crowding, the smell of their fellow-men, and so forth. The endless myriads of circumstances which accompany and influence every event, crowd round that event in their heads, and not merely the externals, that is, the visible and picturesque traits, the details of colour and costume, but also, and chiefly, the internals, that is, the motions of anger and joy, the secret tumult of the soul, the ebb and flow of ideas and passions which are expressed by the countenance, swell the veins, make a man to grind his teeth, to clench his fists, which urge

<sup>1</sup> See the trial of Vittoria Corombona, of Virginia in Webster, of Coriolanus and Julius Cæsar in Shakspeare.

him on or restrain him. They see all the details, the tides that sway a man, one from without, another from within, one through another, one within another, both together without faltering and without ceasing. And what is this insight but sympathy, an imitative sympathy, which puts us in another's place, which carries over their agitations to our own breasts, which makes our life a little world, able to reproduce the great one in abstract? Like the characters they imagine, poets and spectators make gestures, raise their voices, act. No speech or story can show their inner mood, but it is the scenic effect which can manifest it. As some men invent a language for their ideas, so these act and mimic them; theatrical imitation and figured representation is their genuine speech: all other expression, the lyrical song of Æschylus, the reflective symbolism of Goethe, the oratorical development of Racine, would be impossible for them. Involuntarily, instantaneously, without forecast, they cut life into scenes, and carry it piecemeal on the boards; this goes so far, that often a mere character becomes an actor,<sup>1</sup> playing a part within a part; the scenic faculty is the natural form of their mind. Beneath the effort of this instinct, all the accessory parts of the drama come before the footlights and expand before our eyes. A battle has been fought; instead of relating it, they bring it before the public, trumpets and drums, pushing crowds, slaughtering combatants. A shipwreck happens; straightway the ship is before the spectator, with the sailors' oaths, the technical orders of the pilot. Of all the details of

<sup>1</sup> Falstaff in Shakspeare; the queen in *London*, by Greene and Decker; Rosalind in Shakspeare.

human life,<sup>1</sup> tavern-racket and statesmen's councils, scullion's talk and court processions, domestic tenderness and pandering,—none is too small or too lofty : these things exist in life—let them exist on the stage, each in full, in the rough, atrocious, or absurd, just as they are, no matter how. Neither in Greece, nor Italy, nor Spain, nor France, has an art been seen which tried so boldly to express the soul, and its innermost depths—the truth, and the whole truth.

How did they succeed, and what is this new art which tramples on all ordinary rules? It is an art for all that, since it is natural ; a great art, since it embraces more things, and that more deeply than others do, like the art of Rembrandt and Rubens ; but like theirs, it is a Teutonic art, and one whose every step is in contrast with those of classical art. What the Greeks and Romans, the originators of the latter, sought in everything, was charm and order. Monuments, statues, and paintings, the theatre, eloquence and poetry, from Sophocles to Racine, they shaped all their work in the same mould, and attained beauty by the same method. In the infinite entanglement and complexity of things, they grasped a small number of simple ideas, which they embraced in a small number of simple representations, so that the vast confused vegetation of life is presented to the mind from that time forth, pruned and reduced, and perhaps easily embraced at a single glance. A square of walls with rows of columns all alike ; a symmetrical group of draped or undraped forms ; a young man standing up and raising one arm ; a wounded warrior who will not return to the

<sup>1</sup> In Webster's *Duchess of Malfi* there is an admirable accouchement scene.

camp, though they beseech him : this, in their noblest epoch, was their architecture, their painting, their sculpture, and their theatre. No poetry but a few sentiments not very intricate, always natural, not toned down, intelligible to all ; no eloquence but a continuous argument, a limited vocabulary, the loftiest ideas brought down to their sensible origin, so that children can understand such eloquence and feel such poetry ; and in this sense they are classical.<sup>1</sup> In the hands of Frenchmen, the last inheritors of the simple art, these great legacies of antiquity undergo no change. If poetic genius is less, the structure of mind has not altered. Racine puts on the stage a sole action, whose details he adjusts, and whose course he regulates ; no incident, nothing unforeseen, no appendices or incongruities ; no secondary intrigue. The subordinate parts are effaced ; at the most four or five principal characters, the fewest possible ; the rest, reduced to the condition of confidants, take the tone of their masters, and merely reply to them. All the scenes are connected, and flow insensibly one into the other ; and every scene, like the entire piece, has its order and progress. The tragedy stands out symmetrically and clear in the midst of human life, like a complete and solitary temple which limns its regular outline on the luminous azure of the sky. In England all is different. All that the French call proportion and fitness is wanting ; Englishmen do not trouble themselves about them, they do not need them. There is no unity ; they leap suddenly over twenty years, or

<sup>1</sup> This is, in fact, the English view of the French mind, which is doubtless a refinement, many times refined, of the classical spirit. But M. Taine has seemingly not taken into account such products as the *Modes* on the one hand, and the works of Aristophanes and the Latin sensualists on the other.—Tr.

five hundred leagues. There are twenty scenes in an act—we stumble without preparation from one to the other, from tragedy to buffoonery; usually it appears as though the action gained no ground; the different personages waste their time in conversation, dreaming, displaying their character. We were moved, anxious for the issue, and here they bring us in quarrelling servants, lovers making poetry. Even the dialogue and speeches, which we would think ought particularly to be of a regular and continuous flow of engrossing ideas, remain stagnant, or are scattered in windings and deviations. At first sight we fancy we are not advancing, we do not feel at every phrase that we have made a step. There are none of those solid pleadings, none of those conclusive discussions, which every moment add reason to reason, objection to objection; people might say that the different personages only knew how to scold, to repeat themselves, and to mark time. And the disorder is as great in general as in particular things. They heap a whole reign, a complete war, an entire novel, into a drama; they cut up into scenes an English chronicle or an Italian novel: this is all their art; the events matter little; whatever they are, they accept them. They have no idea of progressive and individual action. Two or three actions connected endwise, or entangled one within another, two or three incomplete endings badly contrived, and opened up again; no machinery but death, scattered right and left and unforeseen: such is the logic of their method. The fact is, that our logic, the Latin, fails them. Their mind does not march by the smooth and straightforward paths of rhetoric and eloquence. It reaches the same end, but by other approaches. It is at once more compre-

hensive and less regular than ours. It demands a conception more complete, but less consecutive. It proceeds, not as with us, by a line of uniform steps, but by sudden leaps and long pauses. It does not rest satisfied with a simple idea drawn from a complex fact, but demands the complex fact entire, with its numberless particularities, its interminable ramifications. It sees in man not a general passion—ambition, anger, or love; not a pure quality—happiness, avarice, folly; but a character, that is, the imprint, wonderfully complicated, which inheritance, temperament, education, calling, age, society, conversation, habits, have stamped on every man; an incommunicable and individual imprint, which, once stamped in a man, is not found again in any other. It sees in the hero not only the hero, but the individual, with his manner of walking, drinking, swearing, blowing his nose; with the tone of his voice, whether he is thin or fat;<sup>1</sup> and thus plunges to the bottom of things, with every look, as by a miner's deep shaft. This sunk, it little cares whether the second shaft be two paces or a hundred from the first; enough that it reaches the same depth, and serves equally well to display the inner and invisible layer. Logic is here from beneath, not from above. It is the unity of a character which binds the two actions of the personage, as the unity of an impression connects the two scenes of a drama. To speak exactly, the spectator is like a man whom we should lead along a wall pierced at separate intervals with little windows; at every window he catches for an instant a glimpse of a new landscape, with its million details: the walk over,

<sup>1</sup> See *Hamlet*, *Coriolanus*, *Hotspur*. The queen in *Hamlet* (v. 2) says: "He (Hamlet)'s fat, and scant of breath."



if he is of Latin race and training, he finds a medley of images jostling in his head, and asks for a map that he may recollect himself; if he is of German race and training, he perceives as a whole, by natural concentration, the wide country which he has only seen piecemeal. Such a conception, by the multitude of details which it combines, and by the depth of the vistas which it embraces, is a half-vision which shakes the whole soul. What its works are about to show us is, with what energy, what disdain of contrivance, what vehemence of truth, it dares to coin and hammer the human medal; with what liberty it is able to reproduce in full prominence worn out characters, and the extreme flights of virgin nature.

## VI.

Let us consider the different personages which this art, so suited to depict real manners, and so apt to paint the living soul, goes in search of amidst the real manners and the living souls of its time and country. They are of two kinds, as befits the nature of the drama: one which produces terror, the other which moves to pity; these graceful and feminine, those manly and violent. All the differences of sex, all the extremes of life, all the resources of the stage, are embraced in this contrast; and if ever there was a complete contrast, it is here.

The reader must study for himself some of these pieces, or he will have no idea of the fury into which the stage is hurled; force and transport are driven every instant to the point of atrocity, and further still, if there be any further. Assassinations, poisonings, tortures, outcries of madness and rage; no passion and

no suffering are too extreme for their energy or their effort. Anger is with them a madness, ambition a frenzy, love a delirium. Hippolyto, who has lost his mistress, says, "Were thine eyes clear as mine, thou might'st behold her, watching upon yon battlements of stars, how I observe them."<sup>1</sup> Aretus, to be avenged on Valentinian, poisons him after poisoning himself, and with the death-rattle in his throat, is brought to his enemy's side, to give him a foretaste of agony. Queen Brunhild has panders with her on the stage, and causes her two sons to slay each other. Death everywhere; at the close of every play, all the great people wade in blood: with slaughter and butcheries, the stage becomes a field of battle or a churchyard.<sup>2</sup> Shall I describe a few of these tragedies? In the *Duke of Milan*, Francesco, to avenge his sister, who has been seduced, wishes to seduce in his turn the Duchess Marcelia, wife of Sforza, the seducer; he desires her, he will have her; he says to her, with cries of love and rage:

"For with this arm I'll swim through seas of blood,  
Or make a bridge, arch'd with the bones of men,  
But I will grasp my aims in you, my dearest,  
Dearest, and best of women!"<sup>3</sup>

For he wishes to strike the duke through her, whether she lives or dies, if not by dishonour, at least by murder; the first is as good as the second, nay better,

<sup>1</sup> Middleton, *The Honest Whore*, part i. iv. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Beaumont and Fletcher, *Valentinian*, *Thierry and Theodoret*. See Massinger's *Picture*, which resembles Musset's *Barberine*. Its crudity, the extraordinary and repulsive energy, will show the difference of the two ages.

<sup>3</sup> Massinger's Works, ed. H. Coleridge, 1859, *Duke of Milan*, ii. 1.

for so he will do a greater injury. He calumniates her, and the duke, who adores her, kills her; then, being undeceived, loses his senses, will not believe she is dead, has the body brought in, kneels before it, rages and weeps. He knows now the name of the traitor, and at the thought of him he swoons or raves :

'I'll follow him to hell, but I will find him,  
And there live a fourth Fury to torment him.  
Then, for this cursed hand and arm that guided  
The wicked steel, I'll have them, joint by joint,  
With burning irons scar'd off, which I will eat,  
I being a vulture fit to taste such carrion."<sup>1</sup>

Suddenly he gasps for breath, and falls; Francesco has poisoned him. The duke dies, and the murderer is led to torture. There are worse scenes than this; to find sentiments strong enough, they go to those which change the very nature of man. Massinger puts on the stage a father who judges and condemns his daughter, stabbed by her husband; Webster and Ford, a son who assassinates his mother; Ford, the incestuous loves of a brother and sister.<sup>2</sup> Irresistible love overtakes them; the ancient love of Pasiphaë and Myrrha, a kind of madness-like enchantment, and beneath which the will entirely gives way. Giovanni says :

"Lost ! I am lost ! My fates have doom'd my death !  
The more I strive, I love ; the more I love,  
The less I hope : I see my ruin certain. . . .  
I have even wearied heaven with pray'rs, dried up

<sup>1</sup> *Duke of Milan*, v. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Massinger, *The Fatal Dowry* ; Webster and Ford, *A late Murderer of the Sonne upon the Mother* (a play not extant) ; Ford, *'Tis pity she's a Whore*. See also Ford's *Broken Heart*, with its sublime scenes of agency and madness.

The spring of my continual tears, even starv'd  
 My veins with daily fasts : what wit or art  
 Could counsel, I have practis'd ; but, alas !  
 I find all these but dreams, and old men's tales,  
 To fright unsteady youth : I am still the same ;  
 Or I must speak, or burst." <sup>1</sup>

What transports follow ! what fierce and bitter joys,  
 and how short too, how grievous and mingled with  
 anguish, especially for her ! She is married to another.  
 Read for yourself the admirable and horrible scene  
 which represents the wedding night. She is pregnant,  
 and Soranzo, the husband, drags her along the ground,  
 with curses, demanding the name of her lover :

" Come strumpet, famous whore ! . . .

Harlot, rare, notable harlot,  
 That with thy brazen face maintain'st thy sin,  
 Was there no man in Parma to be bawd  
 To your loose cunning whoredom else but I !  
 Must your hot itch and plurality of lust,  
 The heyday of your luxury, be fed  
 Up to a surfeit, and could none but I  
 Be pick'd out to be cloak to your close tricks,  
 Your belly-sports ?—Now I must be the dad  
 To all that gallimaufry that is stuff'd  
 In thy corrupted bastard-bearing womb ?  
 Say, must I ?

*Annabella.* Beastly man ! why, 'tis thy fate.  
 I su'd not to thee. . . .

S. Tell me by whom." <sup>2</sup>

She gets excited, feels and cares for nothing more,  
 refuses to tell the name of her lover, and praises him

<sup>1</sup> Ford's Works, ed. H. Coleridge, 1859, '*Tis pity she's a Whore*, l. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* iv. 3.



(*To Vasquez.*) Pish, do not beg for me, I prize my life  
As nothing ; if the man will needs be mad,  
Why, let him take it."<sup>1</sup>

In the end all is discovered, and the two lovers know they must die. For the last time, they see each other in Annabella's chamber, listening to the noise of the feast below which shall serve for their funeral-feast. Giovanni, who has made his resolve like a madman, sees Annabella richly dressed, dazzling. He regards her in silence, and remembers the past. He weeps and says :

"These are the funeral tears,  
Shed on your grave ; these furrow'd-up my cheeks  
When first I lov'd and knew not how to woo. . . .  
Give me your hand : how sweetly life doth run  
In these well-colour'd veins ! How constantly  
These palms do promise health ! . . .  
Kiss me again, forgive me. . . . Farewell."<sup>2</sup> . . .

He then stabs her, enters the banqueting room, with her heart upon his dagger :

"Soranzo see this heart, which was thy wife's.  
Thus I exchange it royally for thine."<sup>3</sup>

He kills him, and casting himself on the swords of banditti, dies. It would seem that tragedy could go no further.

But it did go further ; for if these are melodramas, they are sincere, composed, not like those of to-day, by Grub Street writers for peaceful citizens, but by impassioned men, experienced in tragical arts, for a violent, over-fed melancholy race. From Shakspeare to Milton, Swift, Hogarth, no race has been more gluttoned with coarse

<sup>1</sup> *'Tis pity she's a Whore*, iv. 3.    <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* v. 5.    <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* v. 6.

expressions and horrors, and its poets supply them plentifully; Ford less so than Webster; the latter a sombre man, whose thoughts seem incessantly to be haunting tombs and charnel-houses. "Places in court," he says, are but like beds in the hospital, where this man's head lies at that man's foot, and so lower and lower."<sup>1</sup> Such are his images. No one has equalled Webster in creating desperate characters, utter wretches, bitter misanthropes,<sup>2</sup> in blackening and blaspheming human life, above all, in depicting the shameless depravity and refined ferocity of Italian manners.<sup>3</sup> The Duchess of Malfi has secretly married her steward Antonio, and her brother learns that she has children; almost mad<sup>4</sup> with rage and wounded pride, he remains silent, waiting until he knows the name of the father; then he arrives all of a sudden, means to kill her, but so that she shall taste the lees of death. She must suffer much, but above all, she must not die too quickly! She must suffer in mind; these griefs are worse than the body's. He sends assassins to kill Antonio, and meanwhile comes to her in the dark, with affectionate words; pretends to

<sup>1</sup> Webster's Works, ed. Dyce, 1857, *Duchess of Malfi*, i. 1.

<sup>2</sup> The characters of Bosola, Flaminio.

<sup>3</sup> See Stendhal *Chronicles of Italy*, *The Cenci*, *The Duchess of Palmano*, and all the biographies of the time; of the Borgias, of Bianca Capello, of Vittoria Accoramboni.

<sup>4</sup> Ferdinand, one of the brothers, says (ii. 5):

"I would have their bodies  
Burnt in a coal-pit with the ventage stopp'd,  
That their curs'd smoke might not ascend to heaven;  
Or dip the sheets they lie in in pitch or sulphur,  
Wrap them in't, and then light them as a match;  
Or else to-boil their bastard to a cullis,  
And give't his lecherous father to renew  
The sin of his back."

be reconciled, and suddenly shows her waxen figures, covered with wounds, whom she takes for her slaughtered husband and children. She staggers under the blow, and remains in gloom without crying out. Then she says :

“ Good comfortable fellow,  
 Persuade a wretch that's broke upon the wheel  
 To have all his bones new set ; entreat him live  
 To be executed again. Who must despatch me ? . . .  
*Bosola.* Come, be of comfort, I will save your life.  
*Duchess.* Indeed, I have not leisure to tend  
 So small a business.  
*B.* Now, by my life, I pity you.  
*D.* Thou art a fool, then,  
 To waste thy pity on a thing so wretched  
 As cannot pity itself. I am full of daggers.”<sup>1</sup>

Slow words, spoken in a whisper, as in a dream, or as if she were speaking of a third person. Her brother sends to her a company of madmen, who leap and howl and rave around her in mournful wise ; a pitiful sight, calculated to unseat the reason ; a kind of foretaste of hell. She says nothing, looking upon them ; her heart is dead, her eyes fixed, with vacant stare :

*Cariola.* What think you of, madam ?  
*Duchess.* Of nothing :  
 When I muse thus, I sleep.  
*C.* Like a madman, with your eyes open ?  
*D.* Dost thou think we shall know one another  
 In the other world ?  
*C.* Yes, out of question.  
*D.* O that it were possible we might  
 But hold some two days' conference with the dead !

<sup>1</sup> *Duchess of Malfi*, iv. 1.



From them I should learn somewhat, I am sure,  
 I never shall know here. I'll tell thee a miracle;  
 I am not mad yet, to my cause of sorrow:  
 The heaven o'er my head seems made of molten brass,  
 The earth of flaming sulphur, yet I am not mad.  
 I am acquainted with sad misery  
 As the tann'd galley-slave is with his oar."<sup>1</sup> . . .

In this state, the limbs, like those of one who has been newly executed, still quiver, but the sensibility is worn out; the miserable body only stirs mechanically; it has suffered too much. At last the gravedigger comes with executioners, a coffin, and they sing before her a funeral dirge:

"*Duchess.* Farewell, Cariola . . .  
 I pray thee, look thou giv'st my little boy  
 Some syrup for his cold, and let the girl  
 Say her prayers ere she sleep.—Now, what you please:  
 What death?  
*Boeola.* Strangling; here are your executioners.  
*D.* I forgive them:  
 The apoplexy, catarrh, or cough o' the lungs  
 Would do as much as they do. . . . My body  
 Bestow upon my women, will you? . . .  
 Go, tell my brothers, when I am laid out,  
 They then may feed in quiet."<sup>2</sup>

After the mistress the maid; the latter cries and struggles:

"*Cariola.* I will not die; I must not; I am contracted  
 To a young gentleman.  
*1st Executioner.* Here's your wedding-ring.

<sup>1</sup> *Duchess of Malfi*, iv. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*



C. If you kill me now,  
I am damn'd. I have not been at confession  
This two years.

B. When?<sup>1</sup>

C. I am quick with child."<sup>2</sup>

They strangle her also, and the two children of the duchess. Antonio is assassinated; the cardinal and his mistress, the duke and his confidant, are poisoned or butchered; and the solemn words of the dying, in the midst of this butchery, utter, as from funereal trumpets, a general curse upon existence:

"We are only like dead walls or vaulted graves,  
That, ruin'd yield no echo. Fare you well . . .  
O, this gloomy world!  
In what a shadow, or deep pit of darkness,  
Doth womanish and fearful mankind live!"<sup>3</sup>

"In all our quest of greatness,  
Like wanton boys, whose pastime is their care,  
We follow after bubbles blown in the air.  
Pleasure of life, what is't? only the good hours  
Of an ague; merely a preparative to rest,  
To endure vexation. . . .  
Whether we fall by ambition, blood, or lust,  
Like diamonds, we are cut with our own dust."<sup>4</sup>

You will find nothing sadder or greater from the *Edda* to Lord Byron.

We can well imagine what powerful characters are necessary to sustain these terrible dramas. All these personages are ready for extreme acts; their resolves break forth like blows of a sword; we follow, meet at

<sup>1</sup> "When," an exclamation of impatience, equivalent to "make haste," very common among the old English dramatists.—*Tr.*

<sup>2</sup> *Duchess of Malf.* iv. 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* v. 5.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* v. 4 and 5.

every change of scene their glowing eyes, wan lips, the starting of their muscles, the tension of their whole frame. Their powerful will contracts their violent hands, and their accumulated passion breaks out in thunder-bolts, which tear and ravage all around them, and in their own hearts. We know them, the heroes of this tragic population, Iago, Richard III., Lady Macbeth, Othello, Coriolanus, Hotspur, full of genius, courage, desire, generally mad or criminal, always self-driven to the tomb. There are as many around Shakspeare as in his own works. Let me exhibit one character more, written by the same dramatist, Webster. No one, except Shakspeare, has seen further into the depths of diabolical and unchained nature. The "White Devil" is the name which he gives to his heroine. His Vittoria Corombona receives as her lover the Duke of Brachiano, and at the first interview dreams of the issue :

"To pass away the time, I'll tell your grace  
A dream I had last night."

It is certainly well related, and still better chosen, of deep meaning and very clear import. Her brother Flaminio says, aside :

"Excellent devil ! she hath taught him in a dream  
To make away his duchess and her husband." <sup>1</sup>

So, her husband, Camillo, is strangled, the Duchess poisoned, and Vittoria, accused of the two crimes, is brought before the tribunal. Step by step, like a soldier brought to bay with his back against a wall, she defends herself, refuting and defying advocates and judges, incapable of blenching or quailing, clear in mind, ready

<sup>1</sup> *Vittoria Corombona*, i. 2.

in word, amid insults and proofs, even menaced with death on the scaffold. The advocate begins to speak in Latin.

"*Vittoria*. Pray my lord, let him speak his usual tongue ;  
I'll make no answer else.

*Francisco de Medicis*. Why, you understand Latin.

*V*. I do, sir ; but amongst this auditory  
Which come to hear my cause, the half or more  
May be ignorant in't."

She wants a duel, bare-breasted, in open day, and challenges the advocate :

"I am at the mark, sir : I'll give aim to you,  
And tell you how near you shoot."

She mocks his legal phraseology, insults him, with biting irony :

"Surely, my lords, this lawyer here hath swallow'd  
Some pothecaries' bills, or proclamations ;  
And now the hard and undigestible words  
Come up, like stones we use give hawks for physic :  
Why, this is Welsh to Latin."

Then, to the strongest adjuration of the judges :

"To the point,  
Find me but guilty, sever head from body,  
We'll part good friends ; I scorn to hold my life  
At yours, or any man's entreaty, sir. . . .  
These are but feign'd shadows of my evils :  
Terrify babes, my lord, with painted devils ;  
I am past such needless palsy. For your names  
Of whore and murderess, they proceed from you,  
As if a man should spit against the wind ;  
The filth returns in's face."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Webster Dyce, 1857, *Vittoria Corombona*, p. 20-21.

Argument for argument: she has a parry for every blow: a parry and a thrust:

"But take you your course: it seems you have beggar'd me first,  
And now would fain undo me. I have houses,  
Jewels, and a poor remnant of crusadoes:  
Would those would make you charitable!"

Then, in a harsher voice:

"In faith, my lord, you might go pistol flies;  
The sport would be more noble."

They condemn her to be shut up in a house of convertites:

"V. A house of convertites! What's that?

*Monticelo.* A house of penitent whores.

V. Do the noblemen in Rome

Erect it for their wives, that I am sent

To lodge there!"<sup>1</sup>

The sarcasm comes home like a sword-thrust; then another behind it; then cries and curses. She will not bend, she will not weep. She goes off erect, bitter and more haughty than ever:

"I will not weep;

No, I do scorn to call up one poor tear

To fawn on your injustice: bear me hence

Unto this house of— what's your mitigating title?

*Mont.* Of convertites.

V. It shall not be a house of convertites;

My mind shall make it honester to me

Than the Pope's palace, and more peaceable

Than thy soul, though thou art a cardinal."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Vittoria Corombona*, iii. 2, p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 24.

Against her furious lover, who accuses her of unfaithfulness, she is as strong as against her judges; she copes with him, casts in his teeth the death of his duchess, forces him to beg pardon, to marry her; she will play the comedy to the end, at the pistol's mouth, with the shamelessness and courage of a courtesan and an empress;<sup>1</sup> snared at last, she will be just as brave and more insulting when the dagger's point threatens her:

"Yes, I shall welcome death  
As princes do some great ambassadors;  
I'll meet thy weapon half way. . . 'Twas a manly blow;  
The next thou giv'st, murder some sucking infant;  
And then thou wilt be famous."<sup>2</sup>

When a woman unsexes herself, her actions transcend man's, and there is nothing which she will not suffer or dare.

## VII.

Opposed to this band of tragic characters, with their distorted features, brazen fronts, combative attitudes, is a troop of sweet and timid figures, pre-eminently tender-hearted, the most graceful and lovable, whom it has been given to man to depict. In Shakspeare you will meet them in Miranda, Juliet, Desdemona, Virgilia, Ophelia, Cordelia, Imogen; but they abound also in the others; and it is a characteristic of the race to have furnished them, as it is of the drama to have represented them. By a singular coincidence, the women are more of women, the men more of men, here than elsewhere. The two natures go each to its ex-

<sup>1</sup> Compare Mme. Marneffe in Balzac's *La Cousine Bette*.

<sup>2</sup> *Vittoria Corombona*, v. last scene, pp. 49-50.

treme: in the one to boldness, the spirit of enterprise and resistance, the warlike, imperious, and unpolished character; in the other to sweetness, devotion, patience, inextinguishable affection,<sup>1</sup>—a thing unknown in distant lands, in France especially so: a woman in England gives herself without drawing back, and places her glory and duty in obedience, forgiveness, adoration, wishing and professing only to be melted and absorbed daily deeper and deeper in him whom she has freely and for ever chosen.<sup>2</sup> It is this, an old German instinct, which these great painters of instinct diffuse here, one and all: Penthea, Dorothea, in Ford and Greene; Isabella and the Duchess of Malfi, in Webster; Bianca, Ordella, Arethusa, Juliana, Euphrasia, Amoret, and others, in Beaumont and Fletcher: there are a score of them who, under the severest tests and the strongest temptations, display this wonderful power of self-abandonment and devotion.<sup>3</sup> The soul, in this race, is at once primitive and serious. Women keep their purity longer than elsewhere. They lose respect less quickly; weigh worth and characters less suddenly: they are less apt to think evil, and to take the measure of their husbands. To this day, a great lady, accustomed to company, blushes in the presence of an unknown

<sup>1</sup> Hence the happiness and strength of the marriage tie. In France it is but an association of two comrades, tolerably alike and tolerably equal, which gives rise to endless disturbance and bickering.

<sup>2</sup> See the representation of this character throughout English and German literature. Stendhal, an acute observer, saturated with Italian and French morals and ideas, is astonished at this phenomenon. He understands nothing of this kind of devotion, "this slavery which English husbands have had the wit to impose on their wives under the name of duty." These are "the manners of a seraglio." See also *Corinne*, by Madame de Staël.

<sup>3</sup> A perfect woman already: meek and patient.—HETWOOD.

man, and feels bashful like a little girl: the blue eyes are dropt, and a child-like shame flies to her rosy cheeks. English women have not the smartness, the boldness of ideas, the assurance of bearing, the precocity, which with the French make of a young girl, in six months, a woman of intrigue and the queen of a drawing-room.<sup>1</sup> Domestic life and obedience are more easy to them. More pliant and more sedentary, they are at the same time more concentrated and introspective, more disposed to follow the noble dream called duty, which is hardly generated in mankind but by silence of the senses. They are not tempted by the voluptuous sweetness which in southern countries is breathed out in the climate, in the sky, in the general spectacle of things; which dissolves every obstacle, which causes privation to be looked upon as a snare and virtue as a theory. They can rest content with dull sensations, dispense with excitement, endure weariness; and in this monotony of a regulated existence, fall back upon themselves, obey a pure idea, employ all the strength of their hearts in maintaining their moral dignity. Thus supported by innocence and conscience, they introduce into love a profound and upright sentiment, abjure coquetry, vanity, and flirtation: they do not lie nor simper. When they love, they are not tasting a forbidden fruit, but are binding themselves for their whole life. Thus understood, love becomes almost a holy thing; the spectator no longer wishes to be spiteful or to jest; women do not think of their own happiness, but of that of the loved ones; they aim not at pleasure, but

<sup>1</sup> See, by way of contrast, all Molière's women, so French; even Agnès and little Louison.



at devotion. Euphrasia, relating her history to Philaster, says :

“ My father oft would speak  
Your worth and virtue ; and, as I did grow  
More and more apprehensive, I did thirst  
To see the man so prais'd ; but yet all this  
Was but a maiden longing, to be lost  
As soon as found ; till sitting in my window,  
Printing my thoughts in lawn, I saw a god,  
I thought, (but it was you) enter our gates.  
My blood flew out, and back again as fast,  
As I had puff'd it forth and suck'd it in  
Like breath : Then was I call'd away in haste  
To entertain you. Never was a man,  
Heav'd from a sheep-cote to a sceptre, rais'd  
So high in thoughts as I : You left a kiss  
Upon these lips then, which I mean to keep  
From you for ever. I did hear you talk,  
Far above singing ! After you were gone,  
I grew acquainted with my heart, and search'd  
What stirr'd it so : Alas ! I found it love ;  
Yet far from lust ; for could I but have liv'd  
In presence of you, I had had my end.”<sup>1</sup>

She had disguised herself as a page,<sup>2</sup> followed him, was his servant ; what greater happiness for a woman than to serve on her knees the man she loves ? She let him scold her, threaten her with death, wound her.

“ Blest be that hand !  
It meant me well. Again, for pity's sake ! ”<sup>3</sup>

Do what he will, nothing but words of tenderness and

<sup>1</sup> Beaumont and Fletcher, *Works*, ed. G. Colman, 3 vols., 1811, *Philaster*, v.

<sup>2</sup> Like Kaled in Byron's *Lara*.

<sup>3</sup> *Philaster*, iv.



*JOHN FLETCHER*



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adoration can proceed from this heart, these wan lips. Moreover, she takes upon herself a crime of which he is accused, contradicts him when he asserts his guilt, is ready to die in his place. Still more, she is of use to him with the Princess Arethusa, whom he loves; she justifies her rival, brings about their marriage, and asks no other thanks but that she may serve them both. And strange to say, the princess is not jealous.

" *Euphrasia.* Never, Sir, will I  
Marry; it is a thing within my vow :  
But if I may have leave to serve the princess,  
To see the virtues of her lord and her,  
I shall have hope to live.

*Arethusa.* . . . Come, live with me ;  
Live free as I do. She that loves my lord,  
Curst be the wife that hates her ! " <sup>1</sup>

What notion of love have they in this country? Whence happens it that all selfishness, all vanity, all rancour, every little feeling, either personal or base, flees at its approach? How comes it that the soul is given up wholly, without hesitation, without reserve, and only dreams thenceforth of prostrating and annihilating itself, as in the presence of a god? Biancha, thinking Cesario ruined, offers herself to him as his wife; and learning that he is not so, gives him up straightway, without a murmur:

" *Biancha.* So dearly I respected both your fame  
And quality, that I would first have periah'd  
In my sick thoughts, than e'er have given consent  
To have undone your fortunes, by inviting  
A marriage with so mean a one as I am :

<sup>1</sup> *Philaster*, v.

I should have died sure, and no creature known  
 The sickness that had kill'd me. . . . Now since I know  
 There is no difference 'twixt your birth and mine,  
 Not much 'twixt our estates (if any be,  
 The advantage is on my side) I come willingly  
 To tender you the first-fruits of my heart,  
 And am content t' accept you for my husband,  
 Now when you are at lowest . . .

*Cesario.* Why, Biancha,  
 Report has cozen'd thee ; I am not fallen  
 From my expected honours or possessions,  
 Tho' from the hope of birth-right.

*B.* Are you not ?  
 Then I am lost again ! I have a suit too ;  
 You'll grant it, if you be a good man. . . .  
 Pray do not talk of aught what I have said t'ye. . .

. . . Pity me ;  
 But never love me more ! . . . I'll pray for you,  
 That you may have a virtuous wife, a fair one ;  
 And when I'm dead . . . *C.* Fy, fy ! *B.* Think on me  
 sometimes,  
 With mercy for this trespass ! *C.* Let us kiss  
 At parting, as at coming ! *B.* This I have  
 As a free dower to a virgin's grave,  
 All goodness dwell with you !"<sup>1</sup>

Isabella, Brachiano's duchess is betrayed, insulted by her faithless husband ; to shield him from the vengeance of her family, she takes upon herself the blame of the rupture, purposely plays the shrew, and leaving him at peace with his courtesan, dies embracing his picture. Arethusa allows herself to be wounded by Philaster, stays the people who would hold back the murderer's arm, declares that he has done nothing, that it is not

<sup>1</sup> Beaumont and Fletcher, *The Fair Maid of the Inn*, iv.

he, prays for him, loves him in spite of all, even to the end, as though all his acts were sacred, as if he had power of life and death over her. Ordella devotes herself, that the king, her husband, may have children;<sup>1</sup> she offers herself for a sacrifice, simply, without grand words, with her whole heart :

" *Ordella*. Let it be what it may then, what it dare,  
I have a mind will hazard it. "

*Thierry*. But, hark you ;  
What may that woman merit, makes this blessing ?

*O*. Only her duty, sir. *T*. 'Tis terrible !

*O*. 'Tis so much the more noble.

*T*. 'Tis full of fearful shadows ! *O*. So is sleep, sir,

Or anything that's merely ours, and mortal ;  
We were begotten gods else : but those fears,  
Feeling but once the fires of nobler thoughts,  
Fly, like the shapes of clouds we form, to nothing

*T*. Suppose it death ! *O*. I do. *T*. And endless parting  
With all we can call ours, with all our sweetness,  
With youth, strength, pleasure, people, time, nay reason !  
For in the silent grave, no conversation,  
No joyful tread of friends, no voice of lovers,  
No careful father's counsel, nothing's heard,  
Nor nothing is, but all oblivion,  
Dust and an endless darkness : and dare you, woman,  
Desire this place ? *O*. 'Tis of all sleeps the sweetest :  
Children begin it to us, strong men seek it,  
And kings from height of all their painted glories  
Fall, like spent exhalations, to this centre. . . .

*T*. Then you can suffer ? *O*. As willingly as say it

*T*. Martell, a wonder !

Here is a woman that dares die.—Yet, tell me,

<sup>1</sup> Beaumont and Fletcher, *Thierry and Theodoret, The Maid's Tragedy, Philaster*. See also the part of Lucina in *Valentinian*.



Are you a wife? O. I am, sir. T. And have children?—  
 She sighs and weeps! O. Oh, none, sir. T. Dare you venture  
 For a poor barren praise you ne'er shall hear,  
 To part with these sweet hopes? O. With all but Heaven."<sup>1</sup>

Is not this prodigious? Can you understand how one human being can thus be separated from herself, forget and lose herself in another? They do so lose themselves, as in an abyss. When they love in vain and without hope, neither reason nor life resist; they languish, grow mad, die like Ophelia. *Aspasia, forlorn,*

“ Walks discontented, with her watry eyes  
 Bent on the earth. The unfrequented woods  
 Are her delight; and when she sees a bank  
 Stuck full of flowers, she with a sigh will tell  
 Her servants what a pretty place it were  
 To bury lovers in; and make her maids  
 Pluck 'em, and strew her over like a corse.  
 She carries with her an infectious grief,  
 That strikes all her beholders; she will sing  
 The mournful'st things that ever ear hath heard,  
 And sigh and sing again; and when the rest  
 Of our young ladies, in their wanton blood,  
 Tell mirthful tales in course, that fill the room  
 With laughter, she will with so sad a look  
 Bring forth a story of the silent death  
 Of some forsaken virgin, which her grief  
 Will put in such a phrase, that, ere she end,  
 She'll send them weeping one by one away.”<sup>2</sup>

Like a spectre about a tomb, she wanders for ever about the remains of her destroyed love, languishes, grows pale, swoons, ends by causing herself to be killed. *Sadder*

<sup>1</sup> *Thierry and Theodoret*, iv. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Beaumont and Fletcher, *The Maid's Tragedy*, 1.

still are those who, from duty or submission, allow themselves to be married, while their heart belongs to another. They are not resigned, do not recover, like Pauline in *Polyeucte*. They are crushed to death. Pen-thea, in Ford's *Broken Heart*, is as upright, but not so strong, as Pauline; she is the English wife, not the Roman, stoical and calm.<sup>1</sup> She despairs, sweetly, silently, and pines to death. In her innermost heart she holds herself married to him to whom she has pledged her soul: it is the marriage of the heart which in her eyes is alone genuine; the other is only disguised adultery. In marrying Bassanes she has sinned against Orgilus; moral infidelity is worse than legal infidelity, and thenceforth she is fallen in her own eyes. She says to her brother:

"Pray, kill me. . . .

Kill, me, pray; nay, will ye?

*Ithocles*. How does thy lord esteem thee? *P*. Such an one

As only you have made me; a faith-breaker,

A spotted whore; forgive me, I am one—

In act, not in desires, the gods must witness. . . .

For she that's wife to Orgilus, and lives

In known adultery with Bassanes,

Is, at the best, a whore. Wilt kill me now? . . .

The handmaid to the wages

Of country toil, drinks the untroubled streams

<sup>1</sup> Pauline says, in Corneille's *Polyeucte* (iii. 2):

"Avant qu'abandonner mon âme à mes douleurs,

Il me faut essayer la force de mes pleurs;

En qualité de femme ou de fille, j'espère

Qu'ils vaincront un époux, ou fléchiront un père.

Que si sur l'un et l'autre ils manquent de pouvoir,

Je ne prendrai conseil que de mon désespoir.

Apprends-moi cependant ce qu'ils ont fait au temple."

We could not find a more reasonable and reasoning woman. So with *Elizante*, and *Henriette*, in *Molière*.

With leaping kids, and with the bleating lambs,  
And so allays her thirst secure ; whiles I  
Quench my hot sighs with fleetings of my tears."<sup>1</sup>

With tragic greatness, from the height of her incurable grief, she throws her gaze on life :

" My glass of life, sweet princess, hath few minutes  
Remaining to run down ; the sands are spent ;  
For by an inward messenger I feel  
The summons of departure short and certain. . . Glories  
Of human greatness are but pleasing dreams,  
And shadows soon decaying ; on the stage  
Of my mortality, my youth hath acted  
Some scenes of vanity, drawn out at length  
By varied pleasures, sweeten'd in the mixture,  
But tragical in issue. . . . That remedy  
Must be a winding-sheet, a fold of lead,  
And some untrod-on corner in the earth."<sup>2</sup>

There is no revolt, no bitterness ; she affectionately assists her brother who has caused her unhappiness ; she tries to enable him to win the woman he loves ; feminine kindness and sweetness overflow in her in the depths of her despair. Love here is not despotic, passionate, as in southern climes. It is only deep and sad ; the source of life is dried up, that is all ; she lives no longer, because she cannot ; all go by degrees—health, reason, soul ; in the end she becomes mad, and behold her dishevelled, with wide staring eyes, with words that can hardly find utterance. For ten days she has not slept, and will not eat any more ; and the same fatal thought continually afflicts her heart, amidst vague dreams of maternal tenderness and happiness

<sup>1</sup> Ford's *Broken Heart*, iii. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* iii. 5.

brought to nought, which come and go in her mind like phantoms :

“ Sure, if we were all sirens, we should sing pitifully,  
 And 'twere a comely music, when in parts  
 One sung another's knell ; the turtle sighs  
 When he hath lost his mate ; and yet some say  
 He must be dead first : 'tis a fine deceit  
 To pass away in a dream ! indeed, I've slept  
 With mine eyes open, a great while. No falsehood  
 Equals a broken faith ; there's not a hair  
 Sticks on my head, but, like a leaden plummet,  
 It sinks me to the grave : I must creep thither ;  
 The journey is not long. . . .  
 Since I was first a wife, I might have been  
 Mother to many pretty prattling babes ;  
 They would have smiled when I smiled ; and, for certain,  
 I should have cried when they cried :—truly, brother,  
 My father would have pick'd me out a husband,  
 And then my little ones had been no bastards ;  
 But 'tis too late for me to marry now,  
 I am past child-bearing ; 'tis not my fault. . . .  
   Spare your hand ;  
 Believe me, I'll not hurt it. . . .  
 Complain not though I wring it hard : I'll kiss it ;  
 Oh, 'tis a fine soft palm !—hark, in thine ear ;  
 Like whom do I look, prithee ?—nay, no whispering.  
 Goodness ! we had been happy ; too much happiness  
 Will make folk proud, they say. . . .  
 There is no peace left for a ravish'd wife,  
 Widow'd by lawless marriage ; to all memory  
 Penthea's, poor Penthea's name is strumpeted. . . .  
 Forgive me ; Oh ! I faint.”<sup>1</sup>

She dies, imploring that some gentle voice may sing her

<sup>1</sup> Ford's *Broken Heart*, iv. 2.

a plaintive air, a farewell ditty, a sweet funeral song.  
I know nothing in the drama more pure and touching.

When we find a constitution of soul so new, and capable of such great effects, it behoves us to look at the bodies. Man's extreme actions come not from his will, but his nature.<sup>1</sup> In order to understand the great tensions of the whole machine, we must look upon the whole machine,—I mean man's temperament, the manner in which his blood flows, his nerves quiver, his muscles act: the moral interprets the physical, and human qualities have their root in the animal species. Consider then the species in this case—namely, the race; for the sisters of Shakspeare's Ophelia and Virgilia, Goethe's Clara and Margaret, Otway's Belvidera, Richardson's Pamela, constitute a race by themselves, soft and fair, with blue eyes, lily whiteness, blushing, of timid delicacy, serious sweetness, framed to yield, bend, cling. Their poets feel it clearly when they bring them on the stage; they surround them with the poetry which becomes them, the murmur of streams, the pendent willow-tresses, the frail and humid flowers of the country, so like themselves:

“The flower, that's like thy face, pale primrose, nor  
The azure harebell, like thy veins; no, nor  
The leaf of eglantine, whom not to slander,  
Out-sweeten'd not thy breath.”<sup>2</sup>

They make them sweet, like the south wind, which with its gentle breath causes the violets to bend their heads,

<sup>1</sup> Schopenhauer, *Metaphysics of Love and Death*. Swift also said that death and love are the two things in which man is fundamentally irrational. In fact, it is the species and the instinct which are displayed in them, not the will and the individual.

<sup>2</sup> *Cymbeline*, iv. 2.

abashed at the slightest reproach, already half bowed down by a tender and dreamy melancholy.<sup>1</sup> Philaster, speaking of Euphrasia, whom he takes to be a page, and who has disguised herself in order to be near him, says :

“ Hunting the buck,  
I found him sitting by a fountain-side,  
Of which he borrow'd some to quench his thirst,  
And paid the nymph again as much in tears.  
A garland lay him by, made by himself,  
Of many several flowers, bred in the bay,  
Stuck in that mystic order, that the rareness  
Delighted me : But ever when he turn'd  
His tender eyes upon 'em, he would weep,  
As if he meant to make 'em grow again.  
Seeing such pretty helpless innocence  
Dwell in his face, I asked him all his story.  
He told me, that his parents gentle dy'd,  
Leaving him to the mercy of the fields,  
Which gave him roots ; and of the crystal springs,  
Which did not stop their courses ; and the sun,  
Which still, he thank'd him, yielded him his light.  
Then he took up his garland, and did shew  
What every flower, as country people hold,  
Did signify ; and how all, order'd thus,  
Express'd his grief : And, to my thoughts, did read  
The prettiest lecture of his country art  
That could be wish'd. . . . I gladly entertain'd him,  
Who was as glad to follow ; and have got  
The trustiest, loving'st, and the gentlest boy  
That ever master kept.”<sup>2</sup>

The idyl is self-produced among these human flowers : the dramatic action is stopped before the angelic sweet-

<sup>1</sup> The death of Ophelia, the obsequies of Imogen.

<sup>2</sup> *Philaster*, I.

ness of their tenderness and modesty. Sometimes even the idyl is born complete and pure, and the whole theatre is occupied by a sentimental and poetical kind of opera. There are two or three such plays in Shakspeare; in rude Jonson, *The Sad Shepherd*; in Fletcher, *The Faithful Shepherdess*. Ridiculous titles nowadays, for they remind us of the interminable platitudes of d'Urfé, or the affected conceits of Florian; charming titles, if we note the sincere and overflowing poetry which they contain. Amoret, the faithful shepherdess, lives in an imaginary country, full of old gods, yet English, like the dewy verdant landscapes in which Rubens sets his nymphs dancing:

"Thro' yon same bending plain  
That flings his arms down to the main,  
And thro' these thick woods, have I run,  
Whose bottom never kiss'd the sun  
Since the lusty spring began." . . .

"For to that holy wood is consecrate  
A virtuous well, about whose flow'ry banks  
The nimble-footed fairies dance their rounds,  
By the pale moon-shine, dipping oftentimes  
Their stolen children, so to make them free  
From dying flesh, and dull mortality." . . .<sup>1</sup>

"See the dew-drops, how they kiss  
Ev'ry little flower that is ;  
Hanging on their velvet heads,  
Like a rope of christal beads.  
See the heavy clouds low falling,  
And bright Hesperus down calling  
The dead Night from underground."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Beaumont and Fletcher, *The Faithful Shepherdess*, I.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* II.

These are the plants and the aspects of the ever fresh English country, now enveloped in a pale diaphanous mist, now glistening under the absorbing sun, teeming with grasses so full of sap, so delicate, that in the midst of their most brilliant splendour and their most luxuriant life, we feel that to-morrow will wither them. There, on a summer night, the young men and girls, after their custom,<sup>1</sup> go to gather flowers and plight their troth. Amoret and Perigot are together; Amoret,

"Fairer far

Than the chaste blushing morn, or that fair star  
That guides the wand'ring seaman thro' the deep,"

modest like a virgin, and tender as a wife, says to Perigot:

"I do believe thee: 'Tis as hard for me  
To think thee false, and harder, than for thee  
To hold me foul."<sup>2</sup>

Strongly as she is tried, her heart, once given, never draws back. Perigot, deceived, driven to despair, persuaded that she is unchaste, strikes her with his sword, and casts her bleeding to the ground. The "sullen shepherd" throws her into a well; but the god lets fall "a drop from his watery locks" into the wound; the chaste flesh closes at the touch of the divine water, and the maiden, recovering, goes once more in search of him she loves:

"Speak, if thou be here,

My Perigot! Thy Amoret, thy dear,  
Calls on thy loved name. . . . 'Tis thy friend,  
Thy Amoret; come hither, to give end

<sup>1</sup> See the description in Nathan Drake, *Shakespeare and his Times*.

<sup>2</sup> Beaumont and Fletcher, *The Faithful Shepherdess*, I.



To these consumings. Look up, gentle boy,  
 I have forgot those pains and dear annoy  
 I suffer'd for thy sake, and am content  
 To be thy love again. Why hast thou rent  
 Those curled locks, where I have often hung  
 Ribbons, and damask-roses, and have flung  
 Waters distill'd to make thee fresh and gay,  
 Sweeter than nosegays on a bridal day?  
 Why dost thou cross thine arms, and hang thy face  
 Down to thy bosom, letting fall apace,  
 From those two little Heav'ns, upon the ground,  
 Show'rs of more price, more orient, and more round,  
 Than those that hang upon the moon's pale brow?  
 Cease these complainings, shepherd! I am now  
 The same I ever was, as kind and free,  
 And can forgive before you ask of me:  
 Indeed, I can and will."<sup>1</sup>

Who could resist her sweet and sad smile? Still deceived, Perigot wounds her again; she falls, but without anger.

"So this work hath end!  
 Farewell, and live! be constant to thy friend  
 That loves thee next."<sup>2</sup>

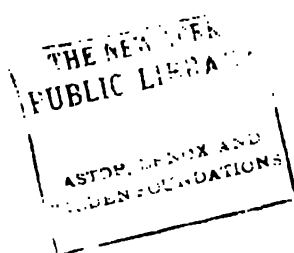
A nymph cures her, and at last Perigot, disabused, comes and throws himself on his knees before her. She stretches out her arms; in spite of all that he had done, she was not changed:

"I am thy love,  
 Thy Amoret, for evermore thy love!  
 Strike once more on my naked breast, I'll prove  
 As constant still. Oh, could'st thou love me yet,  
 How soon could I my former griefs forget!"<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Faithful Shepherdess*, iv.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* v. Compare, as an illustration of the contrast of races, the Italian pastorals, Tasso's *Aminta*, Guarini's *Il Pastor fido*, etc.





*FRANCIS BEAUMONT*



Such are the touching and poetical figures which these poets introduce in their dramas, or in connection with their dramas, amidst murders, assassinations, the clash of swords, the howl of slaughter, striving against the raging men who adore or torment them, like them carried to excess, transported by their tenderness as the others by their violence; it is a complete exposition, as well as a perfect opposition of the feminine instinct ending in excessive self-abandonment, and of masculine harshness ending in murderous inflexibility. Thus built up and thus provided, the drama of the age was enabled to bring out the inner depths of man, and to set in motion the most powerful human emotions; to bring upon the stage Hamlet and Lear, Ophelia and Cordelia, the death of Desdemona and the butcheries of Macbeth.











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